

JUNGLE and STREAM

OR

THE ADVENTURES OF TWO BOYS IN SIAM

BY

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"IN HONOUR'S CAUSE," "CORMORANT CRAG"
"FIRST IN THE FIELD," ETC.

DEAN & SON, LTD.

6 LA BELLE SAUVAGE, LUDGATE HILL,
LONDON, E.C.4

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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"THEN THERE WAS A BOAIS LIKE A PEAL OF THUNDER."

JUNGLE AND STREAM

CHAPTER I SIXTY YEARS AGO

"CHARLIE is my darling, my darling, my darling!" was sung in a good, clear, boyish tenor, and then the singer stopped, to say impatiently,—

"What nonsense it is! My head seems stuffed full of Scotch songs,—'Wee bit sangs,' as the doctor calls them. Seems funny that so many Scotch people should come out here to the East. I suppose it's because the Irish all go to the West, that they may get as far apart as they can, so that there may not be a fight. I say, though, I want my breakfast."

The speaker, to wit Harry Kenyon, sauntered up to the verandah of the bungalow and looked in at the window of the cool, shaded room, where a man-servant in white drill jacket and trousers was giving the finishing touches to the table.

"Breakfast ready, Mike?"

"Yes, sir; coffee's boiled, curry's made."

"Curry again?"

"Yes, Master Harry; curry again. That heathen of a cook don't believe a meal's complete without curry and rice."

"But I thought we were going to have fried fish this morning."

"So did I, sir. I told him plainly enough; but he won't understand, and he's curried the lot."

"How tiresome!"

"I should like to curry his hide, Master Harry, but it's leather-coloured already. Never mind; there's some fresh potted meat."

"Bother potted meat! I'm sick of potted meat. Look here, next time I bring home any fresh fish you go into the kitchen and cook them yourself."

"What, me go and meddle there! Look here, Master Harry, I'll go with you fishing, and wade into that sticky red mud if you want me to; or I'll go with you shooting or collecting, and get my eyes scratched out in the jungle, and risk being clawed by tigers, or stung by snakes, or squeegded flat by an elephant's neat little foot; but I'm not going to interfere with old Ng's pots and pans. Why, he'd put some poison in my vittles."

"Nonsense!"

"He would, sir, sure as I stand here. He looks wonderful gentle and smiling, with that Chinee face of his; but I know he can bite."

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"Poor old Ng ; he's as harmless as his name. N. G.—Ng."

"Name ? I don't call that a name, Master Harry. Fag end of a pig's grunt ; that's about what that is."

"Here, I want my breakfast. Isn't father nearly dressed ?"

"No, sir ; he hasn't begun to shave yet, and he won't be down for another quarter of an hour."

"Call me when he comes," said the lad, and he went off down the garden again, towards the river which flowed swiftly at the bottom, where the bamboo landing-stage had been made, with its high-peaked attap, or palm-leaf roof. It was all bamboo. Big canes were driven into the mud for supports, others for pillars and beams, and the floor was of smaller ones, split and laid close together, and then bound in their places with long lengths of the rotan cane which grew so plentifully in the jungle, running up the great forest trees, and after reaching the top, going on growing till it swung down by the yard, and waited till the wind blew it into the next tree, where it held on by its thorns, and went on growing to any length.

The garden was beautiful in its wildness, the trees having been left for shade ; and John Kenyon, the East India merchant, who had settled far up one of the rivers of Siam ten years before, after the death of his wife, had found out from long experience that he who tries to make an English garden in a tropical country has worry for crops, while he who encourages the native growths makes his home a place of beauty.

So Harry Kenyon sauntered down, keeping out of the hot rays of the early morning sun—hot enough, though it was only six, for people rise early in the East—and made his way to the bamboo platform beneath which the river, here about a hundred yards wide, looked like a stream whose waters had been transformed into a decoction of coffee and chicory, with the milk left out, or, as Harry once said, muddy soup.

The creepers, crowded with many-coloured blossoms, hung down from the trees and ran over the roof, forming, with the dry palm-leaves, nesting and hiding places for plenty of natural history objects from the neighbouring jungle. Birds nested there, and rats and snakes came birds'-nesting, while lizards of various kinds, from the little active fly-catchers to the great shrieking tokay, found that roof an admirable resting-place.

There were sundry rustlings overhead as Harry stepped on to the slippery, squeaking, yielding bamboos ; but use is second nature, and ten years in such company, without reckoning the inhabitants of the jungle, had made the boy so familiar with many of these things that he looked upon them with a calm contempt.

As a matter of course he would have swarmed up a tree fast enough at the sight of a tiger or elephant in either of the forest tracks, or, to use Mike's expression, have made himself scarce if he had encountered a cobra, or seen one of the great boas swaying to and fro from the gigantic limb of a tree. Even at the moment

of stepping upon the covered-in summerhouse-like landing-stage, with its fishing-rods laid up overhead in the bamboo rafters, he shrank a little, and then angrily bared his teeth as he stood gazing down at the water a dozen yards away.

"You beast!" he hissed. "Oh, if you'd only stay there while I fetched a gun! Oh, yes, it's all very well to wink one eye at me; I'd make you wink both."

It seemed odd that the lad should address himself like that to a piece of rugged, gnarled tree-trunk floating slowly down the flashing river; but, as aforesaid, Harry Kenyon had been up the country in Siam ever since he was quite a little fellow, and had been accustomed to have the wild creatures of the forest for pets and companions. Where boys at home had had cats or dogs, Harry had more than once petted a tiger cub; lizards had been as common with him as white mice with English lads. Then he had kept squirrels, snakes, monkeys, and birds to any extent. Moreover, he had once contrived to keep alive, until it became wild instead of tame a hideous-looking creature which lived in a fenced-in patch of sand with half a sugar hogshead sunk level with the ground, provided with a central heap formed of an old tree-root, and filled up with water. This creature strangely resembled the efts or newts so common in some ponds, but magnified many times, so that there was no cause for surprise that the boy should speak as he did to the tree-trunk, for his experienced eyes had seen at a glance that this was no half-rotten stem torn out from the bank by the flooded river. He had recognised the two horny prominences over the eyes, and their furtive, ugly gleam, so that he was not at all surprised when one end of the trunk moved slowly, in a wavy fashion, and the object began to part the water.

"Yes, I thought you'd soon go," said Harry. "Stop a minute, though."

He stepped gently back into the garden and snatched up a piece of stone about as big as two fists, from a heap of rockwork, stole back to the bamboo floor till he could just see over the edge, keeping his movements hidden, and launched out the heavy piece of spar with so good an aim that, after curving through the air just above the surface of the water, it fell with a dull thud right in the centre of the trunk.

The effect was instantaneous. A long muzzle with gaping jaws rose out of the water for a moment, there was a tremendous wallowing which made the water foam, and then a great serrated tail rose several feet above the surface, quivered in a wavy way, delivered a sounding slap on the top of the water, and disappeared.

"I thought that would make you wag your tail, old gentleman. What a whopper! Nearly twenty feet long, and as thick as thick. Pull a man in? Why, it would pull in a young elephant. Oh, how I do hate crocs!"

The boy stood watching the surface for some minutes, but there was no sign of the huge reptile reappearing.

"Gone down," muttered the boy. "Suppose, though, he has swum underneath here, and is waiting to dash out and grab me by the legs. Ugh!" he added, with a shudder, "it does seem such a horrible death, only I suppose the poor people these creatures catch don't feel any more when once they're under the water. Wonder whether they do. Shouldn't like to try."

His thoughts made him peer down through an opening between the warped bamboos, at where the river glided beneath his feet; but all was perfectly quiet there, and he glanced up at the fishing-rods.

"Be no use to try now," he said; "the brute would scare every fish away, and I've got no bait, and—oh, I say, how badly I do want my breakfast! Is father going to lie in bed all day?"

Evidently not, for the minute after a cheery voice cried, "Now, Harry, lad, breakfast!"

CHAPTER II THE JUNGLE HUNTER

HARRY KENYON did not run up the slope to the house, which was erected upon an elevation to raise it beyond the flood when the river burst its bounds, as it made a point of doing once or twice a year during the heavy rains. People out in sunny Siam do not run much, but make a point of moving deliberately as the natives do, for the simple reason that it takes a very short time to get into a violent perspiration, but a very long time to get cool; besides which, overheating means the risk of chills, and chills mean fever.

He walked gently up to meet the tall, thin, rather stern-featured, grizzly-haired man in white flannel and straw hat with puggaree, who had come out to meet him, and who saluted him heartily.

"Lovely morning, my boy, but quite warm enough already. How sweet the blossoms smell!"

"Yes, father," said Harry, whose brain was full of the great reptile; "but I've just seen such a monster."

"Crocodile?"

"Yes; quite twenty feet long."

"With discount twenty-five per cent., Hal?" said the father, laughing.

"No, father, really."

"One's eyes magnify when they look at savage creatures, especially at snakes."

"Oh yes, I know, father," said the lad impatiently; "but this was the biggest I've seen."

"Then it must have been twenty-four feet long, Hal, for I've shown you one of twenty-two."

"I didn't measure him, father; he wouldn't wait," said the boy, laughing; "but he was a monster."

"You threw something at it, I suppose?"

"Yes, a big piece out of the rockery—and hit him on the back. It sounded like hitting a leather trunk."

"Humph!" said Mr. Kenyon. "Boys are boys all the world round, it seems. Here have you been in Siam almost ever since you were born, and you act just in the same way as an English boy at home."

"Act! How did I act?"

"Began throwing stones. Bit of human nature, I suppose, learnt originally of the monkeys. So you hit the brute?"

"Yes, father, and he went off with a rush!"

"Looking for its breakfast, I suppose. Let's go and get ours."

Harry Kenyon required no second invitation, for the pangs of hunger, forgotten in the excitement, returned with full force, and in a few minutes father and son were seated at table in the well-furnished half-Eastern, half-English-looking home, enjoying a well-cooked breakfast, served on delicate china from the neighbouring country, and with glistening silver tea and coffee pot well worn with long polishing, for they were portions of a set of old family plate which had been sent out to the fairly wealthy merchant trading with England from the East.

"Hullo!" said Mr. Kenyon; "why, you are not eating any of your fish!"

"No, father. Ng has spoiled them."

"Spoiled? Nonsense; the curry is delicious."

"But I don't want to be always eating curry, father. I told him to fry them."

"Better leave him to do things his own way, my boy, and have some. They are very good. The Chinese are a wonderfully conservative people. They begin life running in the groove their fathers ran in before them, and go on following it up to the end of their days, and then leave the groove to their sons. Did you catch all these?"

"No; Phra caught more than I did. He is more patient than I am."

"A great deal, and with his studies too."

"Yes, father; I say, the fish are better than I thought."

"I was talking about the Prince being more patient over his studies than you are, Hal," said Mr. Kenyon drily.

"Yes, father," said the lad, reddening.

Mike just then brought in a dish of hot bread-cakes, and no more was said until he had left the room, when Mr. Kenyon continued:—

"Take it altogether, Hal, you are not such a bad sort of boy, and I like the way in which you devote yourself to the collecting for the museum; but I do wonder at an English lad calmly letting one of these Siamese boys leave him behind."

"Oh, but he's the son of a king," said Harry, smiling.

"Tchah! What of that? Suppose he is a prince by birth, like a score more of them, that is no reason why he should beat you."

"He can't, father," said Harry sturdily.

"Well, he seems to."

"If I liked to try hard, I could leave him all behind nowhere."

"Then, why don't you try hard, sir?"

"It's so hot, father."

"And you are so lazy, sir."

"Yes, father. I'll have a little more curry, please."

"I wish I could have your classics and mathematics curried, sir, so as to make you want more of them," said Mr. Kenyon, helping his son to more of the savoury dish. "Yes, Mike?"

"Old Sree is here, sir, with two bearers and a big basket."

"Oh!" cried Harry, jumping up; "what has he got now?"

"Sit down and finish your breakfast, Hal," said his father sternly. "Don't be such a young savage, even if you are obliged to live out here in these uncivilized parts."

The lad sat down promptly, but felt annoyed, and anxious to know what the old hunter employed by his father to collect specimens had brought.

"What has he in the big basket, Mike?" asked Mr. Kenyon.

"Don't know, sir; he wouldn't tell me. Said the Sahibs must know first."

"Then he must have got something good, I know," said Harry excitedly. "I expect it's a coo-ah."

"One o' them big, speckled peacocks with no colour in 'em, Master Harry?" said Mike respectfully. "No, it isn't one o' them; the basket's too small."

"What is it, then?"

"Don't know, sir; but I think it's one o' those funny little bears, like fat monkeys."

"May I send on for Phra, father?"

"Yes, if you like; but perhaps they will not let him come."

"Oh, I think they will; and I promised always to send on to him when anything good was brought in."

"Very well," said his father quietly; "send."

"Run, Mike," said the boy excitedly, and the man made a grimace at him. "Well, then, walk fast, and ask to see him. They'll let you pass. Then tell him we've got a big specimen brought in, and ask him, with my compliments, if he'd like to come on and see it."

"Yes, sir"; and the man hurried out, while Mr. Kenyon, who had just helped himself to a fresh cup of coffee, leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"What are you laughing at, father?" said the boy, with his bronzed face reddening again. "Did I make some stupid blunder?"

"Well, I hardly like to call it a blunder, Hal, because it was done knowingly. I was smiling at the impudence of you, an ordinary British merchant's son, coolly sending a message to a palace and telling a king's son to come on here."

"Palace! Why, it's only a palm-tree house, not much better than this, father; not a bit like a palace we see in books. And as to his being a king's son, and a prince, well, he's only a boy like myself."

"Of the royal blood," Hal."

"He can't help that, father, and I'm sure he likes to come here and read English and Latin with me, and then go out collecting. He said the King liked it too."

"Oh yes, he likes it, or he would not let his son come."

"Phra said his father wanted him to talk English as well as we do."

"And very wise of him too, my boy. This country will have more and more dealing with England as the time goes on."

Harry sat watching his father impatiently, longing the while to get out into the verandah, where he expected that the old hunter would be.

"You are not eating, my boy," said Mr. Kenyon; "go on with your breakfast."

"I've done, thank you, father."

"Nonsense. You always have two cups of coffee. Get on with the meal. It is better to make a good breakfast than to wait till the middle of the day, when it is so hot."

Harry began again unwillingly, and his father remarked upon it.

"You want to get out there, but you told me you did not wish to see what the man has brought till your friend came."

"Yes, I said so, father; but I should like Sree to tell me."

"Finish your breakfast, and you will have plenty of time."

Harry went on, and after the first few mouthfuls his healthy young appetite prevailed, and he concluded a hearty meal.

"There, you can go now," said his father. "Call me when the Prince comes."

Harry Kenyon hurried out into the broad verandah, and then along two sides of the square bungalow so as to reach the back, where sat a little, wrinkled-faced, square-shaped, yellow-skinned man, with his face and head shaved along the sides as high as the tips of his ears, leaving a short, stubbly tuft of grizzled hair extended backward from the man's low forehead to the nape of his neck, looking for all the world like the hair out of a blacking-brush stretched over the top of his head.

His dress was as scanty as that of his two muscular young companions, consisting as it did of a cotton plaid sarong or scarf of once bright colours, but now dull in hue from long usage, and a good deal torn and tattered by forcing a way through the jungle. This was doubled lengthwise and drawn round the loins, and then tightened at the waist by giving the edge of the sarong a peculiar twist and tuck in, thus forming a waist-belt in which in each case was stuck a dagger-like kris, with pistol-shaped handle and wooden sheath to hold the wavy blade, and a parang or heavy sword used in travelling to hack a way through the jungle and form a path by chopping through tangled rotan or tufts of bamboo, or lawyer cane.

The three men were squatted on their heels, with their mouths distended and lips scarlet, chewing away at pieces of betel-nut previously rolled in a pepper-leaf, which had first been smeared

with what looked like so much white paste, but which was in fact lime, made by burning the white coral, abundant along some portion of the shores, and rising inland to quite mountainous height.

As soon as Harry came in sight, all rose up, smiling, and the elder man wanted to exhibit the prize contained within the great square basket standing on the bamboo flooring, while two stout bamboos, each about eight feet long, were stood up against the house, a couple of loops on either side of the basket showing where the bamboo poles had been thrust through so that the basket could hang dependent from the two men's shoulders.

"What have you got, Sree?" asked Harry, in English, which from long service with Mr. Kenyon, and mixing with other colonists, Sree spoke plainly enough to make himself understood.

"Big thing, Sahib. Very heavy."

"Bear?"

The man made a sign, and his two followers grinned with enjoyment, and seated themselves on the basket, which squeaked loudly.

"What did you do that for?" cried Harry.

"The young Sahib must wait till the old Sahib comes, and then he see."

"Old Sahib, indeed!" cried Harry; "why, my father isn't half so old as you."

"The young Sahib wait."

"Of course I can wait," said Harry pettishly, "and I was going to wait. I only asked you what it was."

The man smiled, and shook his head mysteriously, and just then Mike thrust his head out of the door.

"Ah, got back, Mike!" cried Harry. "What did the Prince say?"

"Come on almost directly, sir; but I had no end of a job to get to see him."

"How was that?"

"Oh, those guard chaps; soldiers, I s'pose they call themselves. They're a deal too handy with those spears of theirs. They ought to be told that they mustn't point them at an Englishman's breast."

"Oh, it's only because they're on duty, Mike," replied Harry.

"Wouldn't make any difference to me, sir, whether it was on dooty or off dooty if one of them was to go inside my chest."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of that."

"Afraid! Oh, come, I like that, Master Harry—afraid! Not likely to be afraid of any number of the squatty, yellow-skinned chaps, but they oughtn't to be allowed to carry such things. Fancy Englishmen at home all going about carrying area railings in their hands."

Harry shook his head, for his recollections of spear-pointed area railings were very vague.

"Don't matter, sir," said Mike, "they don't know any better; but I know I shall get in a row one of these days for giving one of 'em a smeller right on the nose."

"Nonsense ! you mustn't do that, Mike."

"Why not, sir ? Couldn't do no harm ; they're as flat as flat as it is."

"You know what my father said about keeping on good terms with the natives."

"Yes, sir, I know, sir, but fair play's a jewel ; if I keep on good terms with them they ought to keep on good terms with me, and sticking a spear-point into a man's wesket aren't the sort o' terms I like. 'Specially when you know the things are poisoned.'

"Nonsense ! The Prince assured me they were not."

"Well, those ugly, twisty krises are, sir."

"No. The only danger from them is their sharp point."

"Well, that's bad enough, sir ; but how about the thing you've got yonder ? What is it, Master Harry ?" he asked.

"Come out and see. Don't stand there with your head just stuck out like a snake in a hole looking to see if it's safe."

"Well, but is it safe, sir ?"

"Come and see. If it's safe enough for me to be out here, it's safe enough for you."

Mike evidently considered this reply unanswerable, for he came out slowly and cautiously, the two men seated on the hamper-like basket evidently enjoying the man's timidity. They glanced at Harry inquiringly, and he gave them a quick nod of assent, with the result that as Mike was passing them, with divers suspicious glances at their seat, they made a sudden spring together, as if the occupant of the bamboo covering had suddenly and by a tremendous effort raised the lid. There was a loud creaking, and with a rush Mike was back through the door, which he banged to.

The old hunter, who had seated himself to prepare a fresh piece of betel-nut for chewing, laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, while his two bearers drew their feet up and squatted now upon the basket lid, chuckling with delight, and looking to Harry as if expecting a fresh hint for startling Mike.

Harry went to the door and pushed at it, finding it give a little, but only to be pressed to directly, as if by Mike's shoulder.

"Here, it's all right ; open the door," cried Harry. "He didn't get out."

The door was opened cautiously, and Mike's head slowly appeared, to look from one to the other and encounter faces that were serious now almost to solemnity.

"I thought he'd got out, sir," said Mike.

"Oh no, he's safe enough ; look how they've fastened the lid down with bamboo skewers."

"Yes, sir, but some o' them things is so awful strong. What is it—tiger ?"

"Oh no, it's not a tiger, Mike. A tiger would scratch and kick a basket like that to pieces in no time."

"Of course he would, sir. I say, Master Harry, hadn't you better tell old Sree to get up and sit on the basket too ?"

"Hardly room, is there?" said Harry seriously.

"Plenty, sir, if you make those chaps squeedge up together a bit."

"But the basket's so tickle, Mike, and their weight might send it over sidewise. If it did the basket would go nearly flat, the lid would be burst off, and where should be we then?"

"I know where I should be, sir," said Mike—"indoors."

"You wouldn't have time, for those beasts are so wonderfully active that this one would be out of the basket like a flash of lightning."

"Would he, sir? Then don't you do it. Let him be. What is it, sir—a leopard?"

"Oh no, not a leopard, Mike."

"What, then? one of those big monkeys we've never yet got a sight of?"

"Monkey? Oh no."

"What is it, then, sir?"

"Well, you see, Mike, I don't know myself yet," said Harry, laughing.

Mike looked at him sharply, then at the three Siamese, whose faces were contorted with mirth, and back at his young master.

"Humbugging me," he said sharply. "That's it, is it, Master Harry? Yah! I don't believe there's anything in the old hamper at all."

He went round the basket from the other direction, so as to reach the door, and as he got behind the two men on the lid, he turned.

"I do wonder at you, Master Harry, laughing at a fellow like that, and setting these niggers to make fun of me. Yah!"

He raised one foot and delivered a tremendous kick at the bottom of the basket, startling the two squatting men on the lid so that one sprang up and the other leaped off on to the bamboo floor of the verandah, while a violent commotion inside the basket showed that its occupant had also been disturbed.

"Something else for you to laugh at," said Mike, and he slipped in and closed the door.

Harry smiled, the man returned to his perch on the lid, frowning and looking very serious, while the occupant of the basket settled down quietly again, making Harry more curious than ever as to what it might be; but he mastered his desire to go and peer through the split bamboo so tightly woven together, and waited impatiently for the coming of his friend and companion.

"I believe it's a big monkey, after all," he said to himself. "Sree always said he was sure there were monsters right away in the jungle, just about the same as the one father saw at Singapore, brought from Borneo. It was precious quiet, though, till Mike kicked the basket. How savage it made him to be laughed at!"

He glanced at the basket again, and then at the old hunter and his men, all three squatting down on their heels, chewing away at their betel-nut, and evidently in calm, restful enjoyment of the habit.

"Just like three cows chewing their cud," said Harry to himself, and then feeling that it was the best way to avoid the temptation to look into the basket, he went along the verandah to the corner of the house, just as his father reached the next corner, coming to join them.

"Well, has Phra come?" he cried.

"No, father, not yet."

"Found out what's in the basket?" said Mr. Kenyon, smiling.

"No; haven't looked."

"Well done, Hal; I didn't give you credit for so much self-denial. But there, I think we have waited long enough. Let's go and see now what we've got."

"No, no, don't do that," said Harry excitedly. "Phra would be so disappointed if we began before he had time to get here."

"Ah well, he will not be disappointed," said Mr. Kenyon, "for here he is."

As he spoke a boat came in sight, gliding along the river at the bottom of the garden—a handsomely made boat, propelled by a couple of rowers standing one in the bow, the other astern, facing the way they were going, and propelling the vessel after the fashion of Venetian gondoliers, their oars being secured to a stout peg in the side by a loop of hemp.

Harry started off down the garden to meet the passenger, who was seated amidships beneath an awning; and as the men ran the craft deftly up to the landing-place, a dark-complexioned, black-haired lad sprang on to the bamboo platform, looking wonderfully European as to his dress, for it was simply of white flannel. It was the little scarlet military cap and the brightly tinted plaid sarong with kris at the waist which gave the Eastern tinge to his appearance.

"Well," he said, in excellent English, as he joined Harry, "what have they got? something from their traps in the jungle?"

"Don't know anything. There they are yonder. We waited till you came."

"Oh," said the Siamese lad, with a gratified look, "I like that. I'm afraid I shouldn't have waited, Hal."

"Oh, but then you're a prince," said Harry.

The Siamese lad stopped short.

"If you're going to chaff me about that, I shall go back," he said.

"All right; I won't then," said Harry. "You can't help it, can you?"

"Of course I can't, and I shan't be able to help it when I'm king some day."

"Poor fellow, no; how horrible!" said Harry mockingly.

"There you go again. You've got one of your teasing fits on to-day."

"No, no, I haven't. It's all right, Phra, and I won't say another word of that sort. Come along."

"Good-morning," said Mr. Kenyon, as the boys reached the verandah. "Come to see our prize?"

"Yes, Mr. Kenyon. What is it you have this time?"

"We are waiting to see. Harry here wanted it to be kept for you."

The new-comer turned to give Harry a grateful nod and a smile, and then walked with his host along the verandah, and turned the corner.

The moment he appeared, the hunter and the two men leaped up excitedly and dropped upon their knees, raising their hands to the sides of their faces and lowering their heads till their foreheads nearly touched the bamboo floor.

The young Prince said a few words sharply in his own language, and the men sprang up.

"Now then, Mr. Kenyon," he said, "let's see what is in the basket."

"What have you got, Sree?" asked Mr. Kenyon.

"Very fine, big snake, Sahib," was the reply.

"A snake?" cried Harry excitedly. "Ugh!"

"A big one?" said the merchant uneasily. Then, recalling the habit of exaggeration so freely indulged in by these people as a rule, he asked the size.

"Long as two men and a half, Sahib," said Sree. "Very thick, like man's leg. Very heavy to carry."

"Humph! Twelve or fourteen feet long, I suppose," said Mr. Kenyon. "Is it dangerous?"

"No, Sahib. I find him asleep in the jungle. He eat too much; go to sleep for long time. Didn't try to bite when we lift him into the basket. Very heavy."

"What do you say, Prince?" said the merchant. "Shall we have the lid off and look at it?"

"Yes. I won't be afraid," was the reply. "Will you, Hal?"

"Not if the brute's asleep; but if it's awake and pops out at us, I shall run for your boat."

"And leave your poor father in the lurch?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"But you'd run too, wouldn't you, father?"

"Not if the snake threw one of its coils round me."

"Then I suppose I shall have to stay," said Harry slowly.

"Perhaps it would be as well," said Mr. Kenyon drily—"You won't run, will you?"

The young Siamese laughed merrily, and showed his white teeth.

"I don't know," he said; "I'm afraid I should. Snakes are so strong, and they bite. I think it would be best to go with Harry."

The hunter said something very humbly in the native tongue.

"He says that he and his men would hold tight on to the snake if it were angry, and shut it up again; but I don't believe they could. They would all run away too."

"I don't think there is any danger," said Mr. Kenyon gravely. "These things always try to escape back to the jungle, and they

are, I believe, more frightened of us than we are of them. We'll have a look at the creature, then, out here, for I have no suitable place for it at present."

"You could turn the birds out of the little aviary and let it loose there, father."

"Good idea, Hal ; but let's see it first. Look here, Sree ; you and your men must lay hold of the brute if it tries to escape."

"Yes, Sahib ; we catch it and shut the lid down again."

"That's right," said the merchant. "Yes, who's that ? Oh, you, Mike. Come to see the prisoner set free ? Come and stand a little farther this way."

"Thank you, sir ; yes, sir," said the man.

Harry nudged the Prince, and the nudge was returned, with a laughing glance.

"No danger, is there, sir ?" said Mike respectfully.

"I hope not," said Mr. Kenyon ; "but you will be no worse off than we are. Like to go back before the basket is opened ?"

"Isn't time, sir ; they've nearly got it open now."

"Run round the other way, Mike," cried Harry.

"Me, sir ? No, thank you," replied the man. "I don't want to run."

Meanwhile the two bearers were holding the lid of the basket firmly down while Sree pulled out eight stout elastic skewers of bamboo, which had held the lid tightly in place. And as one after the other was slowly and carefully extracted with as little movement of the basket as possible, so as not to irritate the snake if awake, or to disturb it if asleep, the interest and excitement increased till only one was left, when Harry glanced at Mike, who stood with eyes widely staring, cheeks puffed out, and fists clenched, as if about to start off at full speed.

Sree looked up at Mr. Kenyon as the two men pressed down harder and he stood ready to pull out the last skewer.

"Out with it," said Mr. Kenyon, and a thrill ran through all present as the last piece of bamboo was withdrawn.

But still the lid was pressed down, and of this the hunter took hold, said a few words to his two men, who stood back right and left, ready to help if necessary, while their master had stationed himself at the back of the basket, facing his employer and the two boys. He held the lid with outstretched hands, and once more he paused and looked at Mr. Kenyon as if waiting for orders to proceed, his aim of course being to make the whole business as impressive as possible.

"Now then, off with it," cried Harry, and in spite of their excitement, to the amusement of the two boys the hunters took off the lid with a tremendous flourish, and stood back smiling with triumph.

"Just like Mike taking the dish-cover off a roast peacock," as Harry afterwards said.

It was too much for the last-mentioned personage. As the basket was laid open for the gentlemen to see its contents, Mike took half

a dozen steps backward as fast as he could, and with his eye fixed upon the open basket he was in the act of turning to run, when he saw everyone else stand fast.

"Lies pretty quiet at the bottom," said Harry, advancing with Phra, Mr. Kenyon keeping close behind.

"Only a little one," said the young Prince, rather contemptuously.

"Here! I say, Sree; what do you mean by this?" cried Harry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Phra. "This is one of your tricks, Hal."

"That it isn't," cried the boy.

"Where is the snake, Sree?" said Mr. Kenyon. "The basket's empty."

CHAPTER III SREE'S PRISONER

THE hunter took a couple of steps forward, looked down into the basket, looked up, half stunned with astonishment, looked in the lid, then outside it, lifted up the basket and peered under it, threw down the lid, felt in his sarong, and then, as there was no heavy boa twelve or fourteen feet long in its folds, he turned fiercely to the two men in turn to ask them angrily in their own tongue what they had done with the snake.

Both of them felt in their sarongs and began to protest volubly that they had not touched it; that it was there just now, for they had heard it and felt the weight. It was there—it must be there—and their master had better look again.

"It's a conjuring trick," said Phra, who looked annoyed.

"I had nothing to do with it, then," said Harry. "I hadn't, honour bright," he added hurriedly as his companion looked doubtfully at him. "Here, Sree, have you begun to learn juggling?"

"No, Sahib; it was a lovely snake, all yellow, with big brown spots and purple shadows all over the dark parts. One of these sons of wickedness must have taken it out to sell it to some ship captain to carry away. Surely Sree would not try to cheat the good Sahibs and his Prince by playing tricks like an Indian juggler. Here, Michael; you heard the snake inside before the master came?"

"Yes," said Mike, who looked quite brave now, as he approached and looked into the basket searchingly. "I'm sure I heard it plainly, but there's no snake here now. There has been one here, though, for you can smell it."

"Yes, there has been one here," cried Harry eagerly. "Then where is it gone?"

"Something dreadful has blinded all our eyes, Sahib, so that we cannot see. Thrust in your hand and feel if it is there."

Harry shrank for the moment, for the idea of feeling after a snake that had been rendered invisible was startling; but feeling ashamed the next moment of his superstitious folly, he plunged his hand down into the basket, felt round it, and stood up.

"There's nothing in there," he said.

"Well, you could see that there was not," said his father shortly.

"But there has been one there quite lately," said Harry. "Smell my fingers, Phra."

"Pouf ! Serpent !" cried the young Prince, with a gesture of disgust. "It must have got away."

Sree took hold of the basket, bent down into it, looked all round, and then to the surprise of all he stood it up again, turned it round a little, and then jumped in, to stand upright.

The surprise came to an end directly, for Sree pointed downward, and as he did so he thrust his toes through the bottom of the basket, where no hole had been apparent, but which gave way easily to the pressure of the man's foot from within, thus showing that it must have been broken at that one particular place.

"What ! a hole in the bottom for the reptile to crawl out ? That was wise of you, Sree !"

"I was wise, Sahib, and the basket had no hole in it when we put the snake in."

"Then it must have made one, and forced its way through."

Sree was silent, and looked at Mike as if waiting for him to speak. But Mike had not the least intention of speaking, and stood with his lips pinched together, perfectly dumb.

"Why, of course !" cried Harry excitedly ; "I see now. Mike gave the basket a tremendous kick as he went by it, and startled the serpent, and made it swing about. Why, Mike, you must have broken a hole through then."

"Master Harry, I——" began Mike.

"Yes, Sahib, that was it ; he broke a hole through, and once the snake's head was through he would force his way right out."

"One minute," said Mr. Kenyon rather anxiously ; "tell me, Harry : are you perfectly sure that the snake was there ?"

"Certain, father."

"And you saw Michael kick the basket ?"

"Oh yes, father ; and Michael knows he did."

"That's right enough, sir ; but I didn't mean to let the brute out."

"No, no, of course not," said Mr. Kenyon anxiously ; "but if the serpent was in that basket a short time ago and is gone now, it must either be in one of the rooms here by the verandah or just beneath the house."

"Ow !" ejaculated Mike, with a look of horror, as he glanced round ; and then he shouted as he pointed to an opening in one corner of the verandah, where a great bamboo had been shortened for the purpose of ventilating the woodwork beneath the bungalow, "That's the way he has gone, sir ; that's the way he has gone."

It seemed only too probable, for it was just the kind of place in which a fugitive, gloom-loving reptile would seek for a hiding-place ; while as if to prove the truth of Mike's guess there was a sharp, squeaking sound heard somewhere below the house, and one after the other three rats dashed out of the opening, darted

across the verandah, and sprang into the garden, disappearing directly amongst the plants.

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon ; "the reptile seems to have gone under the house."

"And he will clear away all the rats, Sahib," said Sree, in a tone of voice which seemed to add, "and what could you wish for better than that ?"

"But I think that my son and I would rather have the rats, my man. What do you say, Hal ?"

"Yes, father ; of course. We can't live here with a horrible thing like that always lying in wait for us. How long did you say it was, Sree ?"

"Two men and a half, Sahib."

"And that's a man and a half too long, Sree. What's to be done ?"

Sree looked disconsolately at the merchant, and slowly rubbed his blacking-brush-like hair.

"The Sahib told me to bring everything I could find in the jungle, and this was a lovely snake, all yellow and brown and purple like tortoiseshell. The Sahib would have been so pleased."

"No doubt, if I could have got it shut up safely in some kind of cage ; but you see you have let it go."

"If the Sahib will pardon me," said the man humbly.

"Of course ; yes, it was not your fault, but Michael's. Well, Michael, how are you going to catch this great snake ?"

"Me catch it, sir ?" said Mike mildly.

"Yes, of course ; we can't leave it at liberty here."

"I thought perhaps you would shoot at it, sir, or Master Harry would have a pop at it with his gun."

"That's all very well, Mike ; but it's of no use to shoot till you can see it," cried Harry.

"How can we drive it out, Sree ?" said Mr. Kenyon. "We must get rid of it somehow."

Sree shook his head.

"I'm afraid it will go to sleep now, Sahib," he said.

"For how long ?"

"Three weeks or a month, Sahib. Until it gets hungry again."

"Why not get guns and two of us stand near here to see if it comes out of this hole, while the others go from room to room hammering on the floor ?"

"That sounds well," said the merchant.

"And it would be good to try first if a cat would go down. Snakes do not like cats or the mongoose, and the cat might drive it out. Cats hate snakes."

"That sounds like a good plan, too, Sree. Suppose we try that first. We have a cat, but what about a mongoose ? Have you got one ?"

"I had one when I was in Hindooland, Sahib, but perhaps it is dead now."

"If not, it's of no use to us now," said Mr. Kenyon sarcastically. "Here, Hal, go in and get the two guns hanging in my room. Bring

the powder-flasks and pouches too. Be careful, my lad ; the guns are loaded."

"Come along, Phra," said Harry.

"No, I am going back for my gun."

"I meant to lend you one of mine," said the merchant quietly. "You two lads ought to be able to shoot that reptile if we succeed in driving it out."

"Ah!" cried the young Siamese eagerly. "Thank you."

He looked gratefully at Mr. Kenyon, and then followed Harry into the bungalow.

"This is a nice job," said the latter. "We shall never drive the brute out. This place was built as if they wanted to make a snug, comfortable home for a boa constrictor. There are double floors, double ceilings, and double walls. There's every convenience for the brute, whether he wants to stay a week or a year."

"Never mind ; it will be good fun hunting him. Where are the guns ?"

"Here, in father's room," said the boy, leading the way into the lightly furnished bed-chamber with its matted floor and walls, bath, and couch well draped with mosquito net.

One side was turned into quite a little armoury, guns and swords being hung against the wall, while pouches, shot-belts, and powder-flasks had places to themselves.

"Take care," said Harry, as he took down and handed a gun to his companion, who smiled and nodded.

"Yes," he said ; "but it isn't the first time I've had hold of a gun."

"Well, I know that, Phra. You needn't turn rusty about it. I only said so because it comes natural to warn any one to be careful."

"Hist ! Listen," said the Prince, holding up his hand.

Harry had heard the sound at the same moment. It was a strange, rustling, creeping sound, as of horny scales passing over wood in the wall to their right.

A look of intelligence passed between the boys, and they stood listening for a few moments, which were quite sufficient to satisfy them that the object of their visit within was gliding slowly up between the bamboos of the open wall, probably to reach the palm-thatched roof.

But it was not to do so without hindrance, for after darting another look at his companion Phra cocked his gun, walked close to the wall, and after listening again and again he placed the muzzle of his piece about six inches from the thin teak matting-covered boarding, and fired.

The result was immediate. Whether hit or only startled by the shot, the reptile fell with a loud thud and there was the evident sound of writhing and twisting about.

"Well done, Phra ! You've shot him !" cried Harry ; "but if he dies there we shall have to take the floor up to get him out."

"What is it, boys ? Have you seen the snake ?"

"No, sir. I heard it in the wall, and fired."

"Yes, and you have hit it, too," said the merchant. "Listen."

The boys were quite ready to obey, and all stood attentively trying to analyse the meaning of the movements below the floor.

It proved to be easy enough, for the violent writhings ceased, and the serpent began to ascend the side of the room again in the hollow wall.

They went on tip-toe to the spot they had marked down, and as soon as they were still again they could hear the faint *crick, crick, crick* of the scales on the wood, as the serpent crawled from beneath the floor and extended itself more and more up the side, so that it was plain enough to trace the length upward, till evidently a good six feet had been reached.

"My turn now," said Harry, cocking his piece. "Shall I fire father?"

"No; it would only bring it down again, and if it dies beneath the floor or in the wall it will be a great nuisance to get it out. It will mean picking the place to pieces."

"Let it go on up into the roof, then."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon; "if it gets up there it will be sure to descend to the eaves, and if we keep a pretty good watch we shall see it coming down slowly, and you will both get a good shot at it."

They stood listening for a few minutes longer, and then the *crick, crick* in the wall ceased, and it was evident that a long and heavy body was gliding along over the ceiling.

"Now then, boys, out with you, and I think I'll bring a gun too; but you shall have the honour of shooting the brute if you can. By the way, I don't think Sree has exaggerated as to the reptile's length, and I shall be glad to get rid of such a neighbour."

"It's not moving now," said Harry, in a whisper.

"Yes, I can hear it," said Phra, whose ears were preternaturally sharp; "it's creeping towards where it can see the light shine through, and it will come out right on the roof."

The little party hurried out to where Mike and the three Siamese were anxiously watching the hole in the corner of the verandah, the three latter armed with bamboo poles, and their long knives in their waist-folds, while Mike had furnished himself with a rusty old cavalry sword which he had bought in London, and brought with him because he thought it might some day prove to be useful.

Their watching in the verandah came to an end on the appearance of the little party, and they were posted ready to rush in to the attack of the reptile if it should be shot and come wriggling down off the attap thatch.

But for some minutes after the whole party had commenced their watching there was no sign of the escaped prize, not the faintest rustle or crackle of the crisp, sun-dried roof.

Phra began to grow impatient at having to stand in the hot sun holding a heavy gun ready for firing, and Harry was little better, for the effort of watching in the dazzling glare affected his eyes.

"Can't you send somebody inside to bang the ceiling with a stick, Mr. Kenyon?" said Phra at last.

"Yes," said that gentleman. "This is getting rather weary work. Here, Mike, go indoors and listen till you hear the snake rustling over the ceiling of my room, and then thump loudly with a bamboo."

"Yes, sir," said Mike promptly, and he took two steps towards the house, and then stopped and coughed.

"Well, what is it?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"I beg pardon, sir; but suppose the beast has taken fright at seeing you all waiting for him, and got into the house to hide."

"Yes?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"And is scrawming about all over the floor. What shall I do then?"

"Don't lose a chance; hit it over the head or tail with all your might."

Mike looked warmer than ever, and began to wipe the great drops of perspiration off his forehead.

"Yes, sir," he said respectfully.

"We must not stop to be nice now, for it seems to be hopeless to think of capturing the reptile again, and I can't have such a brute as that haunting the place."

"No, sir, of course not," said Mike.

"Well go on," said Mr. Kenyon sharply. "You are not afraid, are you?"

"Oh no, sir, not a bit; but——"

Mr. Kenyon shrugged his shoulders and strode into the house, while the two lads burst out laughing.

"I say, Mike, you are a brave one!" cried Harry.

"Now, look here," cried the man, "don't you go making the same mistake as the master. I'm not a bit afraid."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Phra.

"No, sir," said the man angrily; "not a bit afraid; but I've got a mother in England, and I don't like to be rash."

"You never are, Mike."

"No, sir, and I won't be. I'm sure every one ought to look before he leaps when it's over a dangerous place, and——Ah! look out; here he comes."

There was a yell, too, from Sree and his two men, who dashed forward together, as all at once the great serpent seemed to dart suddenly from under a fold of the palm-leaf thatch, make an effort to glide along the slope from the neighbourhood of those who were waiting for it, and then failing from the steepness of the incline, rolled over and over, writhing and twining, towards the edge where the bamboo supports formed the pillars of the verandah.

"Here, hi! stop!" roared the boys; but it was all in vain, for the excited Siamese men were deaf to everything save their own impulses, which prompted them to recover the escaped prize, and obtain their promised reward.

"Here, I don't want to shoot one of them," cried Phra, stamping in his disappointment.

"No, no, don't fire," cried Harry, throwing up his gun. "Here, hi, Mike ! Now's your time ; go and help. Lay hold of his tail, but don't be rash."

For the serpent had rapidly reached the edge of the thatch and fallen into one of the flower beds with a heavy thud which proclaimed its weight. But the next minute that was a flower bed no longer.

The serpent began the work of destruction by struggling violently as it drew itself up into a knot, and the three Siamese finished the work. They seemed to have not the slightest fear of the great glistening creature whose scales shone in the sun, but dashed at it to try and pinion it down to the ground.

There was a furious hissing, mingled with loud shouts, panting, rustling, and the sound of heavy blows delivered on the earth and the bamboo flooring of the verandah, as the serpent freed its tail and lashed about furiously. Then there was a confused knot composed of reptile and men, rolling over, heaving and straining, and a gaily coloured sarong was thrown out, to fall a few yards away.

"Can't you get a shot at it, boys ?" cried Mr. Kenyon, as he rushed out.

"Impossible, father."

"Yes, impossible," repeated Mr. Kenyon.

"What fun !" cried Phra excitedly. "They want to catch him alive. Look, Hal, look."

Harry was doing nothing else, and forgetful of all his repugnance he approached so near the struggling knot that he had a narrow escape from a heavy flogging blow delivered by the serpent's tail, one which indented the soft earth with a furrow.

"Ugh ! you beast !" cried Harry, kicking at one of the reptile's folds, which just then offered itself temptingly ; but before the boy's foot could reach it the fold was a yard away and the struggle going on more fiercely than ever.

It was the fight of three stout, strong men against that elongated, tapering mass of bone and muscle, with fierce jaws at one end, a thick, whip-like portion at the other, and the men seemed to be comparatively helpless, being thrown here and there in spite of the brave way in which they clung to the writhing form. The end soon arrived, for the reptile made one tremendous effort to escape, wrenched itself free enough to throw a couple of folds of its tail round the thick bamboo pillar which supported the roof, took advantage of the purchase afforded, and threw off its three adversaries, to cling there with half its body undulating and quivering in the air, its head with its eyes glittering fiercely, and its forked tongue darting in and out, menacing its enemies and preparing to strike.

The men were up again in an instant, ready to resume the attack, Sree giving his orders in their native tongue.

"I'll get hold of his neck," he panted, "and you two catch his tail. Keep him tight to the bamboo, and I'll hold his head close

up and ask the master to tie it to the upright."

"Stand back, all of you!" cried Mr. Kenyon. "Now, boys, get into the verandah and fire outward. You have a fine chance."

"No, no, Sahib," cried the hunter imploringly. "The snake is nearly tired out now, and in another minute we shall have caught it fast."

"Nonsense," cried Mr. Kenyon; "it is far too strong for you. You are all hurt now."

"A few scratches only, Sahib, and we could not bear to see so fine a snake, which the master would love to have, killed like that."

"Thinking of reward, Sree?" said the merchant, smiling.

Harry whispered something to Phra, who nodded.

"Let them have another try, father," cried the boy. "Phra and I don't mind missing a shot apiece."

"Very well," said Mr. Kenyon, and turning to the men—"Take it alive, then, if you can."

From wearing a dull, heavy look of disappointment the faces of the Siamese were all smiles once more, and they prepared to rush in at their enemy on receiving a word from Sree, who now advanced with one of the bamboo poles he had picked up, and held out the end toward the quivering, menacing head of the snake.

The latter accepted the challenge directly and struck at the end of the thick pole, its jaws opening and closing, and the dart of the drawn-back head being quicker than the eye could follow.

Sree was as quick, though. The slightest movement of the wrist threw the end of the pole aside, and the serpent missed it three times running. After that it refused to strike, but drew back its head and swung it from side to side till it was teased into striking once more.

This time there was a sharp jar of the bamboo, as the reptile's teeth closed upon the wood, and the pole was nearly jerked out of the man's hands. But he held on firmly without displaying the slightest fear, swaying to and fro as the reptile dragged and gave.

"Better kill it at once, Sree," cried Mr. Kenyon.

"Pray no, Sahib. He is very strong, but we shall tire him out. I am going to have his neck bound to the great bamboo pillar with a sarong."

"My good fellow," cried the merchant, "if you do it will drag the pillar down."

"And pull half the roof off," said Phra. "Yes, they are very strong, these big serpents."

"I'm afraid he would, Sahib," said the hunter mildly. "Now, if I had time I could go into the jungle and get leaves to pound up and give him, and he would be asleep so that we could put him in the basket."

"Well, hadn't you better go and fetch some?" cried Harry mischievously. "Here, Mike, come and hold this bamboo while Sree goes."

There was a burst of laughter at this, in which the Siamese joined, for Mike's features were for a moment convulsed with horror ; the next he grasped the fact that a joke was being made at his expense, and stood shaking his head and pretending to be amused.

"We had better have a shot, my lads," said Mr. Kenyon. "It is too unmanageable a specimen to keep, and I shall be quite content with the skin."

"Let them have another try, Mr. Kenyon," said Phra eagerly. "It is grand to see them fight. Perhaps they will win this time."

"Very well," said Mr. Kenyon, smiling.

"Go and help them, Phra," said Harry, laughing.

"It's so hot," said the young Siamese, "and one would be knocked about so, and have all one's clothes torn off. Besides, you can't take hold, only by clinging round it with your arms, and snakes are not nice. But I will, if you will."

"All right," said Harry ; "only let's have the tail."

Mike looked at the boys in horror, as if he thought they had gone mad.

But at that moment Sree gave a sign to his two followers, after finding that the reptile was so much exhausted that he could force its head in any direction, for it still held on tightly with its teeth.

There was a rush, and the two men seized the creature's tail and began to unwind it from the pillar by walking round and round.

"Hurrah ! they've mastered it," cried Harry, and they drew back as the last fold was untwined from the pillar, Mike drawing much farther back than any one else, so as to give plenty of room.

But the tight clasp of the teeth-armed jaws did not relax in the slightest degree, and the next minute, by the efforts of the three men, the creature was half dragged, half carried out into the open garden, limp apparently and completely worn out.

"Why, they'll manage it yet, father," cried Harry. "Here, Mike, bring that basket out here."

"Yes," cried Mr. Kenyon, "quick !"

Mike looked horrified, but he felt compelled to obey, and, hurrying into the verandah, he was half-way to the men with the basket, when he uttered a yell, dropped it, and darted back.

"It was frightened of Mike," said Phra afterwards.

Frightened or no, all at once when its captors were quite off their guard, the serpent suddenly brought its tremendous muscles into full play, contracted itself with a sudden snatch as if about to tie itself in a knot, and before the men could seize it again, for it was quite free, it went down the garden at a tremendous rate, making at first for the river, then turning off towards the jungle.

The men, as they recovered from their astonishment, darted in pursuit, but stopped short, for Mr. Kenyon's gun rang out with a loud report, making the serpent start violently, but without checking its course, and it was half out of sight among the low-growing bushes when, in rapid succession, Phra and Harry fired, with the effect of making the reptile draw itself into a knot again,

roll, and twine right back into the garden, give a few convulsive throes, and then slowly straighten itself out at full length and lie heaving gently, as a slight quiver ran from head to tail.

The boys cheered, and after reloading in the slow, old-fashioned way of fifty years ago, went close up to the reptile.

"Shall I give him another shot in the head, Mr. Kenyon?" cried Phra.

"No, no, my lad; it would be only waste of powder and shot. The brute is beyond the reach of pain now. Well, Hal, how long do you make it?" he cried, as that young gentleman finished pacing the ground close up to the great reptile.

"Five of my steps," said Harry; "and he's as thick round as I can span—a little thicker. I say, isn't he beautifully marked, father?"

"Splendidly, my boy."

"But who'd have thought a thing like that could be so strong?"

"They are wonderfully powerful," said Mr. Kenyon. "It is a splendid specimen, Sree," he continued to that personage, who, with his companions—all three looking sullen and out of heart—was rearranging dragged-off or discarded loin-cloths, and looking dirty, torn, and in one or two places bleeding, from the reptile's teeth.

"Yes, Sahib," said the man sadly; "he would have been a prize, and I should have been proud, and the Sahib would have been grateful in the way he always is to his servants."

"Oh, I see," said Harry, who whispered to his father and then to Phra, both nodding.

"I could not have kept such a monster as that alive, Sree," said the merchant; "but you men behaved splendidly. You were brave to a degree, and of course I shall pay you as much or more than I should have given you if it had been poisoned alive."

"Oh, Sahib!" cried the man, whose face became transformed, his eyes brightened, and with a look of delight he brought a smile to his lips.

Turning quickly to his two men, he whispered to them in their own tongue, and the change was magical. They uttered a shout of joy, threw themselves on their knees, raised their hands to the sides of their heads, and shuffled along towards the master.

"That will do, Sree," cried Mr. Kenyon impatiently; "make them get up. You know I do not like to be treated like that."

"Yes, Sahib; I know," said the hunter, and at a word the two men started up, beaming and grinning at the two lads.

"Brave boys," said Phra, speaking in his own tongue; and, thrusting his hand in his pocket, he brought out and gave each of the men one of the silver coins of the country.

The next moment all three were grovelling on the earth before their young Prince.

He waved his hand and they rose.

"I don't much like it now, Hal," said Phra apologetically; "but

it is the custom, you know. I like to be English, though, when I am with you."

"Oh, it's all right," said Harry ; "but you do improve wonderfully, lad. You'll be quite an English gentleman some day. I say, father, give me some silver ; I want to do as Phra did."

Mr. Kenyon smiled and handed his son some money, nodding his satisfaction as he saw him give each of the Siamese a coin, and check them when they were about to prostrate themselves.

"No, no," he shouted ; "be English. Pull your blacking-brushes —so."

The men grinned, and gave a tug at what would have been their forelocks if they had not been cropped short.

"Skin the snake very carefully, Sree," said Mr. Kenyon quietly, after liberally rewarding the men, whose gloom gave place to the exuberance of satisfaction.

"Yes, Sahib ; there shall not be a tear in the skin," cried the old hunter eagerly.

"Where shall they do it, father ?" said Harry. "It will make such a mess here."

"Let them drag it down to the landing-stage, my boy, and they can sluice the bamboo flooring afterwards, and then peg out the skin to dry on the side. You will stay and see it done ?

"Yes, father," replied the boy, and he turned to Phra.

"Will you stop ?"

"Of course. I came to stay," was the reply ; "didn't you see that I sent the boatmen back ?"

CHAPTER IV FISHING WITH A WORM

"I SAY, Sree, hadn't you and your fellows better have a wash ?" said Harry, as soon as Mr. Kenyon had re-entered the bungalow to go to his office on the other side for his regular morning work connected with the dispatching of rice and coffee down to the principal city.

"What good, Sahib ?" said the man, looking up with so much wonder in his amiable, simple face, that both Phra and Harry burst out laughing, in which the men joined.

"Why, you are all so dirty, and you smell nasty and musky of that great snake."

"But we are going to skin it, Sahib, and we shall be much worse then."

"Oh yes, I forgot," said Harry.

"When we have done we shall all bathe and be quite clean, and go and thank the good Sahib before we depart."

He said a few words to his two men, and, gun in hand, the boys walked with them towards the boa, when a thought occurred to Harry.

"I say," he cried, "mind what you are about when you bathe, for there's a crocodile yonder, half as long again as that snake."

"Ah!" ejaculated the man, "then we must take care."

"So will we, Phra. We'll look out for him and try and get a shot."

"A big one?" said the Siamese lad.

"Yes, I think it is the biggest I have seen."

"Then we'll shoot him. But how bad you have made me! Before we became friends I followed our people's rule—never killing anything. Now this morning I am going to try and kill a crocodile, after helping to kill a snake."

"Well," said Harry, "I don't care about arguing who's right, but it seems to be very stupid not to kill those horrible great monsters which drag people who are bathing under water and eat them, and to be afraid to kill a tiger that springs upon the poor rice and coffee growers at the edges of the plantations."

"So it does," said Phra, with a dry look; "and I am trying not to be stupid. Ah, look there!"

Harry was already looking, for as one of the men took hold of the serpent's tail, in order to drag it down to the landing-place, it was snatched away, then raised up and brought down again heavily to lie heaving and undulating, the movement being continued right up to the head.

"You don't seem to have killed that," said Harry drily.

"No," replied Phra; "but I will," and he cocked his gun.

But Sree addressed a few words to him in his native tongue, and the lad nodded.

"What does he say?" asked Harry; "he can kill it more easily, without spoiling the skin?"

"Yes. Look. What a while these things take to die!"

"My father says that at home in England the country people say you can't kill a snake directly. It always lives till the sun sets."

"You haven't got snakes like that in England?"

"Oh no; the biggest are only a little more than a yard long."

"But how can they live like that? What has the sun to do with it?"

"Nothing. Father says it's only an old-fashioned superstition."

"Look! Sree's going to kill the snake now. He's a bad Buddhist."

"Never mind; he's a capital hunter. See what splendid things we've found when we've been with him," said Harry enthusiastically. "He seems to know the habits of everything in the jungle."

Harry ceased speaking, for Sree drew a knife from its sheath in the band of his sarong, or padung, whetted it on one of the stones of the rockery, and went to the head of the serpent, which was moving gently.

Sree bent down, extending his left hand to grip the reptile softly behind the head, and give it a mortal wound which would afterwards serve as the beginning of the cut to take off the beautifully marked skin.

But at the first touch, the reptile seemed to be galvanized into

life, and coiling and knotting itself up, it began to twine and writhe with apparently as much vigour as before receiving the shots.

"Did you ever see such a brute?" cried Harry. "Take care, or you'll lose him."

"Oh, no, Sahib; I will not do that. Only let me get one cut, and I will soon make him still."

He waited for a few minutes till the reptile straightened itself out again, and then at a sign the two men followed their leader's example, throwing themselves down upon the fore part of the boa, which began to heave again, the lower part of the body writhing and flogging the earth.

But Sree was quite equal to the occasion. He had pinned the reptile's neck down with one hand, and managed to hold it till with all the skill of an old huntsman, he had slit up the skin, inserted his knife, and cleverly divided the vertebræ just behind the creature's head.

The moment this was done the tremendous thrashing of the tail part began to grow less violent, then grew more gentle still, and finally it lay undulating gently.

"He will die now," said the man, and the long, lithe body was dragged to the bottom of the garden and stretched out on the bamboo landing-stage beneath the attap roofing.

As soon as this was done, the three men went down to the water's edge, stripped off their sarongs, washed them, and spread them in the hot sun to dry, while, gun in hand, the two lads stood carefully scanning the river in search of enemies, so as to get a shot.

But no great reptile was in sight then, and they remained looking on while Sree and his men cleverly stripped off the boa's skin and stretched it out to dry, before fetching a couple of brass vessels from the back of the bungalow and using them to thoroughly remove all traces of their late work.

Their next duty was to take a couple of bamboos and thrust off the body of the serpent.

Sree, however, undertook to do this himself, telling his men to refill the brass vessels to sluice down the bamboo stage.

But instead of thrusting the repulsive-looking reptile off, he stopped, thinking for a few moments.

"What is it?" said Phra; "why don't you throw that nasty thing in to be swept out to sea?"

Sree gave him a peculiar look, and turned to Harry.

"Was it a very big crocodile, Sahib?" he said.

"Yes. Why?"

"Would you like to have a shot at it?"

"Of course; but these big ones are so cunning."

"Let's see," said the man. "Perhaps I could get you a shot."

The boys were interested at once.

"What are you going to do?" said Phra.

"See if I can bring one up where you can shoot."

"How?" asked Harry.

"Is there a big hook in the house?" said Sree.

"Do you want one?"

"Yes, Sahib."

"Go up, then, and tell Mike to give you one of the biggest meat-hooks. Say I want it directly, and then he will."

The two men squatted down at the end of the landing-place, smiling, behind their vessels of water, as Sree hurried up the garden, while the two boys stood, gun in hand, scanning the surface of the river.

"He's going to make a bait of the snake, I suppose; but I don't expect the croc will be about here now. If the water were clear we could see."

But, as before said, the stream was flowing of a rich coffee or chocolate hue, deeply laden as it was with the fine mud of the low flats so often flooded after rains in the mountains, and it was impossible to see a fish, save when now and then some tiny, silvery scrap of a thing sprang out, to fall back with a splash.

"We're only going to make ourselves hot for nothing," said Harry. "I don't believe we shall see the beast. Now, if you had been here when I saw him."

"And both of us had had guns," said Phra. "What nonsense it is to talk like that! One never is at a place at the right time."

"Fortunately for the crocs," said Harry, laughing. "Here he is."

"What, the croc?" cried Phra, cocking his gun.

"No, no; Sree.—Got it?"

"Yes, Sahib. A good big one."

The man came on to the landing-stage, smiling, with the bright new double hook in his hand and a stout piece of string. Then taking down a little coil of rope used for mooring boats at one of the posts, he thrust one of the hooks through the hemp, bound it fast with string, leaving a long piece after knotting off, and then passed the other hook well through the vertebræ and muscles behind the snake's head, using the remaining string to bind the shank of the hook firmly to the serpent's neck so as to strengthen the hold.

There were about twenty yards of strong rope, and Sree fastened the other end of this to the post used to secure the boats, before looking up at the boys.

"Large big fishing," he said, with a dry smile. "Fish too strong to hold."

"And that's rather a big worm to put on the hook," said Harry, laughing. "There, throw it out, and let's see if we get a bite. Are you going to fish, Phra?"

"No," said the Prince; "I am going to shoot. You can hold the line."

"Thankye, but I'm going to fish too. Throw out, Sree."

The old hunter's throwing out was to push one end of the serpent off the end of the bamboo stage, with the result that the rest glided after it, and with their guns at the ready the two boys waited to

see if there was a rush made at the bait as it disappeared beneath the muddy stream.

But all they saw was a gleam or two of the white part of the serpent, as it rolled over and over, then went down, drawing the rope slowly out till the last coil had gone ; and then nothing was visible save a few yards of rope going down from the post into the water, and rising and falling with the action of the current.

Sree squatted down by the post and went on chewing his betel, his two men by the brass vessels doing the same.

So five, ten, fifteen minutes passed away, with the boys watching, ready to fire if there was a chance.

"Oh, I say, this is horribly stupid," cried Harry at last. "Let's give it up."

"No," said Phra ; "you want patience to fish for big things as well as for little. You have no patience at all."

"Well, I'm not a Siamese," said Harry, laughing. "We English folk are not always squatting down on our heels chewing nut and pepper-leaf, and thinking about nothing."

"Neither am I," said Phra ; "but I have patience to wait."

"It is your nature to," said Harry. "You're all alike here ; never in a hurry about anything."

"Why should we be ?" replied Phra quietly. "We could not in a hot country like ours. You always want to be in a hurry to do something else. Look at Sree and his men ; see how they wait."

"Yes, I suppose they're comfortable ; but I'm not. I want to go and lie down under a tree. Think it's any good, Sree ? Won't come, will he ?"

"Who can say, Sahib ?" replied the man. "He ought to if he is about here. That bait is big and long ; the bait must go far down the stream, and it smells well."

"Smells well, eh ?" said Harry.

"Beautiful for a bait, Sahib. You are sure you saw one this morning ?"

"Saw it, and hit it a fine crack with a big stone."

"Then he ought to be there and take that bait ; and he will, too, if you have not offended him by making his back too sore."

"Offended him ! Made his back too sore !" said Harry, with a chuckle. "What a rum old chap you are, Sree ! You talk about animals just as if they felt and thought as we do."

"Yes, Sahib, and that is what the bonzes teach. They say that when people die they become crocodiles, or elephants, or birds, or serpents, or monkeys, or some other kind of creature."

"And that's all stuff and nonsense, Sree. You don't believe all that, I know."

"It's what I was taught, Sahib," said the man, with a queer twinkle of the eye.

"But you don't believe it, Sree. You don't think that some one turned when he died into that old snake, or else you wouldn't have caught it to sell to my father as a specimen."

"And then skinned it and made a bait of it on a hook to catch a crocodile," said Phra.

"Not he. Look at him," cried Harry. "See how he's laughing in his sleeve."

"He isn't. Hasn't got any sleeves."

"Well, inside, then. His eyes are all of a twinkle. He doesn't believe it a bit. There, I shan't stand here any longer cuddling this gun, with nothing to shoot at."

"It is rather stupid, Hal."

"Yes. Here, jump up, Sree, and take us where we can have a shoot at something, or go and fish; I don't care which."

"Come and see the elephants," suggested Phra.

"No, I want to be under the shady trees. What's the good of going to see the tame elephants? They're not white, after all. Chained by one leg and nodding their old heads up and down, up and down, till they see you, and then they begin sticking out their leeches."

"Sticking out their leeches?" said Phra, looking at him wonderingly.

"Trunks, then. They always look to me like jolly great leeches ready to hold on to you. Let's go. Pull up the hook and line, Sree, and get rid of that nasty snake."

"Yes, Sahib," said the old hunter, beginning to haul on the rope, which came in heavily for a few feet.

"It comes in slowly," said Phra; "has something taken the bait?"

Whush! went the line through Sree's hands, and then *whang!* as it was snapped tight with such violence that the man started from it, for the stout post was jarred so that it quivered and seemed about to be pulled down, while the light bamboo and palm roof swayed, and the whole structure seemed as if it were going to be dragged over into the river.

There was no doubting the violence of the wrench and the danger, for the two men sprang off on to the shore and stood staring, till Sree shouted to them to come back and help haul.

"Why, we've caught him, Phra," cried Harry, as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment. "Look out, lad, and be ready to fire as soon as he shows upon the surface. Pull, Sree; don't let him drag like that at the post again."

"I can't move him, Sahib," said the man, who looked startled; and he was already hauling with all his might, but doing nothing more than slightly ease the strain on the post.

But first one and then the other man got a grip of the rope, pulling together with such effect that whatever had seized the bait and become hooked began to jerk the line violently, as if it were throwing its head from side to side.

"Be ready to shoot, Master Harry," said Sree. "He may rush up to the top of the water and come at us, or try to sweep us off here with his tail."

"Nonsense!" cried Harry.

"'Tisn't," said Phra calmly, as he stood like a bronze statue, ready to fire. "I saw a man swept off a boat once like that."

"By a croc?"

"Yes."

"What then?" said Harry huskily.

"I don't know. He was never seen again. Ah, look out!"

As Phra spoke there was a violent eddying in the water where the end of the line must have been.

"He's coming up," cried Harry, raising his gun to his shoulder. "Hold on, all of you. Ah, here he is. Fire!"

The two guns went off almost like one, for all at once the hideous knotted head of a crocodile appeared at the surface and came rapidly towards the stage slackening the rope and making the two men quit their hold and, in spite of an angry cry from Sree, tumble one over the other ashore.

The hunter behaved bravely enough, but the moment had arrived when he felt that discretion was the better part of valour—when it was evident that the hideous reptile, enraged at finding such a finale to the delicious repast of musky boa, neatly skinned apparently for its benefit, but followed by a horrible tearing sensation in its throat and the pressure of a long rope which could not be swallowed nor bitten through because it persisted in getting between the teeth, had risen to the surface, caught sight of a man dragging at the rope, had aimed straight at him as being the cause of all the pain, and was about to rush at and sweep him from the platform.

Under the circumstances Sree was about to let go and follow the example of his men, but the firing checked the crocodile's charge, sending it rushing down below with a tremendous wallow and splash on the surface with its tail; the rope ran out again, and Sree proudly held on, congratulating himself on not having let go, but repenting directly after, for there was a jerk which seemed as if it would drag his arms out of their sockets, and if he had not let the rope slide he must have gone head first into the river.

Then came another drag at the post which supported the roof, and once more everything quivered, but not so violently as before, while Sree tightened his hold again and roared to his men to come.

The movement of the rope now showed that the great reptile was swimming here and there deep down in the muddy water, while the two lads with hands trembling from excitement reloaded as quickly as they could; and as the two men resumed their places on the stage and took hold of the rope, the sharp clicking of gunlocks told that a couple more charges were ready.

"Think we can kill him, Sree?" cried Harry.

"I daren't say, Sahib. The rope may break by his teeth at any time, but we'll drag and make him come up again, so that you can have another shot. What are you loaded with?"

"Big slugs," cried Phra.

"Ought to be bullets," said the hunter.

"But we are very near, Sree," chimed in Harry.

"Yes, Sahib; but an old crocodile like this is so horny. Never mind; you must try. Say when you're ready."

"Now," said Phra hoarsely, and Harry stood with his lips pinched and his forehead a maze of wrinkles.

Sree turned fiercely to his two followers, who had hold of the rope close behind him.

"If you let go this time, I'll knock you both in," he cried, "and then you'll be killed and eaten, and come to life again as crocodiles."

The men shivered at this to them horrible threat, and Harry and Phra exchanged glances.

Meanwhile Sree was, so to speak, just feeling the crocodile's head, and as no extra strain was put upon the rope the reptile kept on swimming to and fro; but the moment the rope was tightened and the three men gave a steady drag there was a violent eddying of the water, the rope slackened, and the huge head and shoulders shot out as if the brute meant to reach its enemies in one bound.

But once more the reports of the two guns came nearly together, and the gaping jaws of the reptile snapped together as the head disappeared.

"Load again," cried Harry excitedly. "Let him run, Sree."

The hunter nodded, and as soon as the guns were loaded the drag and reappearance of the beast took place, another couple of shots were received, and this time the reptile whirled itself round and making good use of its favourite weapon struck at the occupants of the landing-stage, its tail sweeping along with terrific force.

But the brute had miscalculated the distance. Six feet nearer, and the two lads would have been swept into the river. As it was they felt the wind of the passing tail and heard the loud humming *whish* as it passed.

"That was near, Phra," said Harry.

"Yes; the hideous wretch! the beast!" hissed the Siamese lad through his teeth, and followed it up with another loud, hollow, hissing noise from the barrel of his gun, as he rammed a wad down upon the powder. "Let's go on and kill him. Such a wretch ought not to live and destroy everything he can reach along the banks. Oh, how I wish we had some big bullets! I'd half fill the gun."

"Then I'm glad you have none, old chap," said Harry.

"Why?" cried Phra, pausing, ramrod in hand.

"You ought to know by now. Burst the gun."

"Nearly ready, Sahib?" cried Sree. "He's pulling harder, and I'm afraid of the rope breaking."

"Not quite," said Phra, but a minute later, "Let's stand a bit farther back, Hal. Now, Sree, pull."

There was another steady draw upon the rope, which ran out now quite at right angles with the stage, and in an instant it was responded to by a tremendous rush. The water rose in a wave, then parted, as the open jaws of the crocodile appeared, coming right at them. The next moment the landing-stage quivered and

rocked, for it was as if a tree-trunk had struck it right at the edge. Then there was a splash which sent the water flying all over the edifice, and all was still.

The reptile's charge had its effect, for as it fell back into the water the three Siamese rose to their feet from where they had flung themselves off from the staging in among the flowering bushes, and Harry and Phra sat up on the path which led into the garden.

"Oh, what a beast!" cried Phra, rubbing himself. "I hate him, oh, ten thousand times worse now!"

"Lucky we didn't shoot one another," said Harry. "I say, see how I've scratched the stock of father's gun."

"Why didn't you fire, Sahib?" said Sree ruefully, as he began picking thorns out of his left arm.

"Come, I like that!" cried Harry. "Why didn't you three hold on by the rope? I say, Sree, this is a one-er."

"You see, he doesn't like that hook, Sahib," said the hunter.

"But he has got to like it," said Harry. "There, we're not beaten. Come on again. We must kill him now."

"I'm afraid, Sahib, he is one of those old savage crocodiles that are enchanted, and can't be killed."

"Oh, are you?" said Harry drily; "then I'm not. And if that rope doesn't break, we're going to kill him for being so impudent, aren't we, Phra?"

"Yes," said the lad, with his dark eyes flashing. "We will kill him now if it takes pounds of powder."

"And hundredweights of shot," said Harry. "Now then, look at the primings, and then stir the wretch up again, Sree, before he jigs that post down."

The jerking of the post was transferred to the arms of the men as the two lads stepped back to the bamboo floor, ready once more, and laughingly now, as they trusted to their own activity to escape the reptile's jaws. The men began to haul at the rope, with the same result as before.

But the boys were more ready this time. They watched the approaching wave, and as the open jaws of the enemy appeared, they fired right in between them, as if moved by the same impulse; and this time the creature dropped back at once.

"That was a good one, Sree," cried Harry, beginning to reload.

"It was great and wonderful, Sahib. How glad I am to see you both trying to slay the old murderer! A few more shots like that, and he will never again drag little children and poor weak women down to his holes in the muddy banks. It is a grand thing to do; but the bullets should be heavier than those."

"Never mind," said Phra; "we'll make these do."

Once more the order was given to pull, and the rope was tightened as it descended just in the same place, showing that the reptile was lying still in the same spot—probably a hole in the muddy bed—which had formed its lurking-place during the last few minutes.

It was a complete repetition in every respect of the last rush,

and, taught by experience, the lads were as quick in the repetition of their last tactics. The wave rose in response to the heavy drag, the water eddied and parted, and once more a couple of heavy charges of slugs were poured between the hideous, gaping jaws, which closed with a snap, and the head sank down out of sight.

But this time there was a fresh surprise. The monster's tail rose high in the air, and delivered three or four tremendous smacks on the surface, raising such a foam and shower that it was only dimly seen how the reptile must have tried to evade its enemies by shooting up stream.

But it was apparent by the direction of the rope, to which the three men held on as long as they could, the final jerk making them let go for a few minutes, but only for Sree to seize hold again.

"He must have got that last badly, Sahib," said the hunter gravely, as he began to pull in the slack, which showed that the reptile was no longer straining at the line.

"Bring him back then directly we're ready," cried Harry, "and we'll give him another dose. But I say," he added, as he went on loading quickly, "that line comes in very easily."

"Yes, Sahib, and we must be on the look-out. I thought he had rushed up stream, but he must be close here."

"I know," cried Phra; "it's just like the cunning beast. He has come back, and is hiding under the floor. We must look out."

"Yes, Sahib," replied the hunter; "very likely, for they are cunning things. I will not pull in more rope till you are ready for him."

"Ready!" cried Phra a minute later, and Harry echoed the cry.

"Better stand on my other side, Sahibs," said Sree; and the lads took up the more advantageous place—one, too, which made the hunter more safe from proving the resting-place of the next volley of bullets.

The two men eagerly took their places at the rope, for familiarity with the danger incurred had thoroughly bred contempt; and the hauling began slowly and steadily, every one being on the *qui vive*, and ready to spring back.

But the first yard came without the slightest resistance.

"Look out!" said Harry, holding his gun to his shoulder, and aiming down at the water; "he must be very near."

Another yard came without the crocodile being felt.

"He must be close in," whispered Phra, and the excitement now became intense; for their enemy seemed to be playing a very artful game under cover of the thick water, which completely shielded the approach.

"Better stand farther back, Sahibs," said Sree, ceasing to pull.

"But we couldn't see to shoot," said Harry.

"Better not shoot than be seized by this child of a horrible mother, Sahib."

"We should have time to spring back," said Phra; "for we should see the water move. Go on pulling in the rope."

"Yes, go on," said Harry excitedly. "I can't bear this waiting. Haul quicker, and let's have it over."

The men obeyed, and another yard was easily and slowly drawn in, the Siamese in their excitement opening their eyelids widely so as to show the opalescent eyeballs ; but still there was no check, and the curve of the rope now showed that the hook end must be close under the stage.

"Now, Sahibs, mind," whispered Sree hoarsely ; "he is down there by your feet, or else right under the floor."

The lads glanced down at the frail, split bamboos, through whose interstices they could just catch the gleam of the flowing water, while the same idea came to both.

Suppose the brute were to dash its head upward ? It would break through as easily as if the flooring had been of laths.

But all was still save the rippling whisper of the water and the hum of insect life outside in the blistering sunshine, as the men drew on cautiously, inch by inch, in momentary expectation of the development of a cunning attack.

It was almost in breathless awe now that the men ceased pulling for a few moments in response to an order from Sree, who whispered to his superiors,—

"We are just at the end, Sahibs ; be quite ready to fire."

"We are," they replied, in a husky whisper.

"Then we shall pull now sharply, Sahibs."

"Pull," said Harry. "Quick !"

The men gave two rapid heaves, and the boys started back with a shout.

"Oh !" roared Harry, stamping about the floor, "only to think of that !"

For Sree was standing holding out the frayed and untwisted end of the rope, worn through at last by the crocodile's teeth, and parted in the last rush.

"Oh, I say !" cried Phra.

"Mind ! Look out !" yelled Harry, making a dash for the shore, and immediately there was a regular stampede, which ended in the Prince seizing his friend by the arm, and thumping his back with the butt of the gun he held.

"Oh, I say, don't—don't !" panted Harry, who was choking with laughter.

"Then will you leave off playing such tricks ?"

"Yes, yes—please, please !" cried Harry. "Oh, don't ; it hurts."

"I know : it'll be like that fable of the shepherd boy and the wolf. Some day he'll come and no one will run."

"I don't care, so long as you leave off thumping me with that gun. Don't, Phra, old chap," he added, growing serious ; "it's dangerous to play with guns."

"It's too bad," said Phra. "I thought the beast was jumping on to us. What a pity, though ! All that powder and shot wasted for nothing."

"The bullets were too small, Sahib," said Sree ; "but I'm afraid you could never have killed that crocodile."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Harry ; "bullets would have done it." Sree shook his head solemnly.

"Look at him, Phra. I did think he was sensible."

"No ; he's nearly as superstitious as any of them," replied the lad.

"No, Sahib," said Sree ; "I only think it's strange that you fired shot after shot into that thing, and still he was as strong as ever. I hope he will not stop about here, and make it not safe to come down to the landing-place. It would be bad."

"Ahoy—oy—oy!" rang out in a clear, manly voice, and the sound of oars was followed by a boat gliding into sight.

CHAPTER V

THE DOCTOR'S POST-MORTEM

"MORNING, Mr. Cameron," cried Harry heartily, as the boat, propelled by its fore-and-aft rowers, glided up to the landing-stage, Sree handing the crocodile-catching rope to one of the men to make the boat fast, while the occupant of the seat beneath the central awning leapt out.

He was a good-looking, lightly bronzed, red-haired man of about thirty, tall, and active apparently as a boy, and as he strode over the yielding bamboo flooring, making it creak, he shook hands warmly.

"How are you, my lads?—Ah, Sree!" and the hunter salaamed.

"I'm jolly, Mr. Cameron. Phra's bad. Put out your tongue, old chap."

Phra's reply was a punch in the chest.

"Looks terribly bad," said the new arrival, who knew his friends. "Here, what does all this shooting mean? I came on to see."

"Awful great croc," cried Harry.

"Shooting at it?"

"Yes, and the big slugs rattled off it like hail on a lot of dry thatch."

"Then you did not kill it?"

"Kill it—no. Only wish we had. Mr. Cameron, it was a monster."

"So I suppose. Nine feet long, eh?"

"Nine feet long!" said Harry contemptuously ; "why, it was over twenty."

"You young romancer!" cried the new-comer. "How long was it, Prince?"

"I've only seen its head," said Phra. "It was big enough for it to be thirty feet."

"Then I beg your pardon humbly, Hal."

This was accompanied by a hearty clap on the shoulder.

"Oh, I don't mind," said the lad merrily. "Only if you won't believe me, Mr. Cameron, I won't believe you."

"I never tell travellers' tales, Hal."

"No, but you tell me sometimes that your nasty mixtures will do me good, and that's precious hard to believe."

The young doctor laughed.

"You ought to have killed the croc, though," he said.

"Sahib! Sahib, look!" cried Sree, as a shout arose from Mr. Cameron's boatmen.

All turned sharply to where the men were pointing, to see, floating on its back and with its toad-like under part drying in the hot sunshine, the body of a huge crocodile.

"That's ours," cried Harry.

"Or a dead one from somewhere up the river," said the doctor. "But we'll soon prove it with our noses."

"Hooray! no need," cried Harry; "that's him;" for all at once the great reptile undulated in the water, struggled, splashed, and turned over, swam round, and went up the river again, passing out of sight.

"Well, you are pretty sportsmen! Why didn't you shoot?"

"I never thought of the gun," said Phra.

"Here, take us in your boat, and let's follow him, Mr. Cameron."

There was another shout before the doctor could answer, for the men could see that the reptile's strength was exhausted, it being once more upon its back, floating down the stream.

"We'll shoot this time," said Phra.

"There is no need, master," said Sree. "I think it is dead now."

"I came to have a chat with your father," said the doctor; "but I must make acquaintance with our friend yonder. Look here, Sree, take the boat and the rope and tow the brute ashore. Take care that it is dead first. Don't run any risks."

"No, Sahib," said the man, drawing his keen knife from his waist and trying its edge and point.

"Ah, I need not try to teach you, Sree."

"Here's father," cried Harry, as Mr. Kenyon came out of the open window of the bungalow and walked down to where they stood.

"Ah, Cameron, how are you? Glad to see you, man. How is the wife?"

"Complaining about the heat. But look yonder."

He pointed at the floating reptile, and the merchant uttered an exclamation of wonder.

"So that explains the firing, boys. It is a monster. What a good riddance! What are you going to do, Sree?"

"Put a rope round his neck and bring him ashore, Sahib."

"Yes, we ought to take some measurements. But be careful, or it will capsize you; I don't think it's dead."

"It will be soon, Sahib," said the man meaningly.

"Yes, but those creatures have such strength in their tails. Where is your spear, man?"

"In my boat, Sahib, far away."

"Here, Harry, run to the hall and take down one of those Malay spears."

Harry ran, and after a moment's hesitation the young prince followed him, walking in a slow, dignified way. But long contact and education with an English boy had left its traces, and before he had gone many yards the observances of his father's jungle palace were forgotten, and he dashed off as hard as he could go, leaping in at the doorway and nearly overturning his companion.

"Here, mind where you're coming to," cried Harry.

"Bring two spears," cried Phra excitedly.

"Well, I am bringing two, aren't I? Thought you'd like to have a go, too."

Phra's arm went over his friend's shoulder in an instant.

"That's what I do like in you," he cried. "You always want to share everything with me."

"You're just as stupid," said Harry drily. "Here, catch hold. Which will you have? Make haste. Come along."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Phra.

"Better choose," said Harry, holding out the long, keen heads. "This one's as sharp as that one, and that one's got as good a point as this. Which is it to be?"

"I don't quite understand," said Phra, gazing in Harry's laughing eyes. "Yes, I do. Either of them will do. How fond you are of trying to puzzle one!"

"Make haste, boys," cried Mr. Kenyon.

Dignity before the common people was once more forgotten, prince and English boy racing down to the landing-stage with the light spears over their shoulders.

"Hullo!" said Harry's father. "I did not mean you to go."

"Oh, we must go, father," cried the lad.

"Well, be careful, Sree. Mind that the boat is kept a little way back."

"Yes, Sahib; I will take care."

"You might have asked me if I'd like to come in my own boat," said the doctor, smiling.

"Oh, Dr. Cameron," said Phra with an apologetic look, "pray go"; and he offered him the spear he held.

"No, no, my dear lad," said the doctor; "I was only joking. It is your task."

"But come too," cried Harry.

"There will be plenty in the boat without me. Off with you."

Harry looked unwilling to stir, but the doctor seized him by the shoulders and hurried him along, and the next minute they were being paddled towards the floating reptile, the men managing so that the boys could have a thrust in turn, the Prince as they passed along one side, Harry on their return on the other.

But the thrusts did not follow one another quickly, for the deep plunging in of the spear by Phra seemed to act like a reviver,

although it was delivered about where the lad believed the heart to be.

In an instant the great reptile had flung itself over and began lashing the water with its tail.

"Take care!" shouted Mr. Kenyon from the landing-stage. But the warning was needless, for a sharp stroke from the oars sent the boat well out of reach, the rowers changing their positions and sending it backward in pursuit, as the crocodile began once more to swim up stream, at a pretty good rate at first, then slower and slower, leaving the water stained with its blood as it went on.

It managed to make its way, though, quite a hundred yards above the bungalow before its tail ceased its wavy, fish-like motion. Then there was a struggle and a little splashing, and once more it turned over upon its back.

"Your turn now," cried Phra excitedly. "I must have missed its heart. You stab it there this time."

"Want the doctor here to tell me where it is," said Harry, as he stood up with his spear poised ready to strike when within reach.

"Thrust just between its front paws, Sahib," said Sree from where he squatted just behind the front rower.

"I will if I can; if I can't, how can I?" hummed Harry.

"Now," whispered Sree.

"Yes, yes, now," cried Phra excitedly.

"There you are, then," muttered the lad, and he delivered a thrust right in the spot pointed out, snatching back the weapon just in time, for the wound seemed to madden the reptile, which turned over and began to struggle with astonishing vigour; but only to roll over again and swim round the boat in that position, giving Phra the opportunity of delivering a deadly thrust, which was followed by another by Harry.

"That has done it," said the latter, for there was no response to these save a slight quivering of the tail, and now Sree rose from where he had crouched.

"Dead now, Sahibs," he said; "he will fight no more."

The two lads worked their spears about in the water a few times to cleanse them, and then sat down under the thatched awning, panting and hot with exertion, while they watched the action of the hunter. Sree, aided by the boatmen, who held the crocodile within reach, leaned over the side and slipped a running noose over the monster's head right up to the neck, drew it tight, and then let the rope run through his hands as the two Siamese rowers made their oars bend in sending the light sampan along, for the huge bulk was heavy. But the stream was with them, and a few minutes after, in obedience to the doctor's instructions, the crocodile was drawn up close to the muddy bank, some fifty yards below the merchant's garden.

Here another rope was fetched out and made fast round one of the hind legs, both ropes being held by Sree's men, while their leader remained in the boat, the boys having sprung ashore.

And now measurements were taken, the monster proving to be just twenty-one feet in length, and of enormous bulk.

"I was not far wrong, Doctor Cameron," said Harry.

"No, my boy; you were not, indeed."

"Are you going to let it float down the river now?" asked Phra.

"Not yet," said the doctor; "but perhaps you two had better go now, for I am about to superintend rather a nasty examination in the cause of science."

"I know," said Harry to his companion; "he is going to see what the thing lives on. Shall we go?"

"No," said Phra gravely; "I want to learn all that I can, and the doctor is so clever, he seems to know everything."

"I heard what you said, Prince," said the doctor, smiling; "but I don't; I wish I did. Now, Sree, you know how to go to work; let's get it over; the water will wash everything away."

The hunter, who had worked with Doctor Cameron in many an expedition, and understood what was required, bent over the side of the boat, made one long opening, and then plunging his knife in again, made another, and with the flowing water for help, in a short time laid bare the various objects which formed the loathsome reptile's food.

First and foremost there was, to the doctor's astonishment, the snake, and as soon as this had been sent floating down the stream there were fish, seven of goodly size, beside some that were quite small. Then the boys were puzzled, but the cleansing water soon showed that what followed next were a couple of water-fowl, nearly as big as geese.

"That's all, is it?" said the doctor.

"No, Sahib, there is something else—something hard," said the hunter, and he searched about, gathering something in his hand, rinsed it to and fro a few times, and carefully threw four objects ashore.

Harry shuddered and felt a horrible, sickening sensation for a few moments, but it was swept away directly after by the feeling of rage which made the blood run hot to his temples.

"I've been thinking what brutes we were, killing things as we have been this morning; but oh, the beast! I should like to kill hundreds."

"Ugh!" ejaculated Phra, as he stamped his foot, and then through his compressed teeth: "The wretches! the monsters! how I hate them!"

He said no more, but stood with his companion listening as the doctor rested on one knee and turned over the objects on the grass.

"Yes, strung on wire; that is why they have not separated. Gilt bronze, and very pretty too. Each one is chased; the leg and arm bangles are bronze too, and quite plain. You may as well put them in your museum, Kenyon, with a label containing their sad little history—Worn by some pretty little Siamese girl dragged under when bathing."

"Yes, Sahib doctor," said Sree respectfully ; "they wear bangles like that three days' journey up the river."

"Horrible!" ejaculated Harry, bending over the relics.

"Horrible indeed, my boy," said his father. Then laying his hand upon Phra's shoulder, "Thank you both, my lads, for ridding the river of a vile old murderer."

"Thank old Sree, too, father," said Harry eagerly, "for he did more than either of us."

"I'm going to thank Sree," said the merchant. "There, let the monster float down to the sea. Don't go away yet ; Doctor Cameron and I want to talk to you."

"Yes, and Harry and I want to go up the river to the wild jungle," said Phra eagerly. "We have not had a hunt for a week."

"Come along, then," said Mr. Kenyon, laying his hand on the Prince's shoulder. "We'll talk it over, and perhaps we can join forces. What's that, Sree ?"

"The crocodiles from below are coming up, Sahib ; they have smelt the blood."

"Yes, look at that," said the doctor, as there was a wallow and a splash not ten yards from the monster's head.

"Take care !" said Mr. Kenyon excitedly. "Don't try to untie those ropes, Sree, or you may have your hand seized ; cut them, and let the reptile go."

Sree obeyed, dividing the strong cords with a couple of cuts. Then taking an oar from one of the boatmen he forced the boat along past the crocodile, giving the latter a thrust, when the current bore it outward, and directly after another of its tribe, of about half the size, raised its head out of the water, and drew itself partly on the bulky body, which rolled over toward it, and then sank back out of sight.

But it was not gone, and the agitation of the surface about the floating body showed that others were there, tearing at it as it floated away.

"I should hardly have thought that we had so many of these brutes about here," said the doctor.

"They come and go, Sahib ; and they hide so. There are plenty more, and that dead one will never reach the sea."

"It's a warning to you two boys never to attempt to bathe off here," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Bathe, father !" cried Harry, glancing down at the bronze rings and the necklace lying in the grass ; "I feel as if I shall never like to bathe again ;" and Phra curled up his lip, as he once more ejaculated :—

"Ugh !"

CHAPTER VI
MAKING PLANS

IT was pleasantly dusk and shady in Mr. Kenyon's museum, where the party had gathered, glad enough to get away from the glare of the sun after the exertions of the morning. For Siam is a country beautiful enough, but one where the sun has a bad habit of making it pretty often somewhere near ninety-nine in the shade. The natives revel in this, and grow strong and well, though it has a tendency to make even them a quiet, deliberate, and indolent people. What wonder, then, that an Englishman should feel indisposed to work?

All the same, there was not much idleness in the Kenyons' bungalow, for the merchant was an indefatigable business man, who had built up a fine business, at the same time finding time for gratifying his intense love for natural history, in which he had an energetic companion in the young doctor, who had been encouraged to settle at Dahcok by one of the kings. As for Harry, his restless nature made him set the hottest weather at defiance unless he was checked, for, to use his own words, "I'm not going to let Phra beat me out of doors, even if he was born in the country."

There had been a few words in connection with his restlessness when the lads bore in the guns and spears, all of which were handed over to Mike to be cleaned and carefully oiled.

"You lads had better sit down now and have a good rest in here; it's cool and shady. Your face is scarlet, Hal. Make Phra stay and have a bit of dinner with us."

"I should like to," said the young Prince eagerly.

"Of course he will, father; but you and Doctor Cameron want to talk."

"About what will interest you as well, I dare say. What were you going to do?"

For Harry had made a sign to Phra, and was sidling towards the door.

"Oh, I don't know, father; look about and do something along with Phra."

"Do you hear him, Doctor? Did you ever see such a restless fellow? He's spoiling the Prince too."

"Oh no," said Phra; "I'm just as bad as he is, sir."

"I begin to think you are," cried Mr. Kenyon. "Look here, Cameron; they've had a fight with the boa whose skin I showed you, and another with that crocodile. That ought to satisfy any two boys who love adventure for quite a month."

"Well, it is a pretty good morning's work," said the doctor, laughing. "Take my advice, lads, and have a rest till dinner-time, and another afterwards. As it happens, Kenyon, I told the wife I shouldn't be back to dinner."

" You wouldn't have gone back if you had not," said Mr. Kenyon laughing. " Oh, by the way, have you completed your collection of fireflies ? "

" No ; there is one which gives out quite a fiery light, very different from the greeny gold of the others. I've seen it three times, but it always soars away over the river or up amongst the lofty trees."

" I know that one," said Phra eagerly.

" I've seen it once," said Harry. " Old Sree would get you one."

" I've asked him, but he has not succeeded yet," said the doctor.

" We'll try, then," said Phra, springing up, an action followed by Harry.

" But the fireflies are best caught by night," said Mr. Kenyon drily.

" Of course," cried Phra, reddening through his yellowish bronze skin, and he dropped back in his chair, with Harry following suit.

But in spite of the heat, the boys could not sit still, and began fidgeting about, while Mr. Kenyon and his friend chatted about the state of the colony.

For want of something else more in accordance with their desires at the moment, the two boys began to go over the various objects in the large, high-ceiled room, which were the result of ten years' collecting. There were bird-skins by the hundred—pheasants with the wondrously-shaped eyes upon tail and wing, which had won for them the name argus ; others eye-bearing like the peacock, but on a smaller scale ; and then the great peacock itself—the Javanese kind—gorgeous in golden green where the Indian kinds were of peacock blue.

Every here and there hung snake-skins, trophies of the jungle, while upon the floor were no less than six magnificent tiger-pelts, each of which had its history, and a black one too, of murder committed upon the body of some defenceless native.

Leopard-skins, too, were well represented. Elephants' tusks of the whitest ivory ; and one strange-looking object stood on the floor, resembling a badly rounded tub about twenty inches in diameter, and formed out of the foot of some huge elephant.

Skulls with horns were there, and skulls without ; cases and drawers of birds' eggs, and lovely butterflies and moths, with brilliant, metallic-looking beetles ; and the boys smiled at one another as they paused before first one thing and then another in whose capture they had played a part.

Here, too, was another stand of weapons that would be suitable for the attack upon some tyrant of the jungle, or for defence against any enemy who might rise against the peace of those dwelling at the bungalow.

The boys were interested enough in the contents of the museum they had helped to form ; but at last the weariness growing upon them became unbearable, and they moved towards the door, expecting to hear some remark made by either Mr. Kenyon or the doctor ; but these gentlemen were too intent upon the subject they had in hand, and about which they were talking in a low voice.

"They didn't hear us come out, Phra," said Harry. "Here let's run and see whether old Sree has gone yet. I hope Mike Dunning has given them all plenty to eat."

"He was told to," said Phra quietly.

"Yes, he was told to," said Harry; "but that does not mean that he always does as he's told."

"One of our servants dare not forget to do what he was ordered," said Phra, frowning.

"No; but our laws don't allow masters to cut off people's heads for forgetting things."

By this time they had passed round the house, to find right at the back Sree and his two men busy at work cleaning and polishing the guns and spears that had been used that morning, while Mike, whose task it was by rights, lounged about giving orders and looking on.

"Have you given those men their dinner, Mike?" asked Harry.

"Oh yes, sir, such a dinner as they don't get every day," replied the man.

"That's more than you know, Mike," said Harry. "Hunters know how to live well out in the jungle; don't they, Sree?"

"We always manage to get enough, Master Harry," said the man, smiling; "for there is plenty for those who know how to find it in the jungle, out on the river's edge, or in the water."

"And you know how to look for provisions if any man does. But here, you, Mike, they've no business cleaning these things. You finish them; I want to talk to Sree."

Mike took the gun Sree was polishing without a word, and went on with the task, while the hunter rose respectfully and stood waiting to hear what the boys had to say.

"We want to have a day in the jungle," said Harry. "What is there to shoot?"

"A deer, Sahib."

"No," said Phra, frowning; "they are so hard to get near. They go off at the slightest noise."

"The young Sahibs might wait and watch by a water-hole," said the hunter. "It is easier to catch the deer when they come to drink."

"But that means staying out in the jungle all night."

"Yes, Sahib, it is the best way."

"No," said Phra.

"What else, Sree?" asked Harry.

"The Sahib said he would like two more coo-ahs; would the Sahibs like to lie in wait for them? I could make them come near enough by calling as they do—*Coo—ah! coo—ah!*"

The man put his hands before his mouth and softly imitated the harsh cry of the great argus pheasant so accurately that Phra nodded his head and smiled.

"Yes, that's like it," cried Harry. "*Coo—ah! coo—ah!*"

"And that isn't a bit like it," said Phra laughingly. "You would not have many come to a cry like that; would he, Sree?"

"No, my Prince," replied the man, shaking his head; "the great birds would not come for that."

"Very rude of them," cried Harry merrily; "for it's the best I can do. Well, shall we try for the *coo—ahs*?"

"What else do you know of, Sree?" asked Phra.

"There was a leopard in the woods across the river yesterday, my Prince; but they are strange beasts, and he may be far away to-day."

"Oh yes, I don't think that's any good," said Harry. "I should like to try for an elephant."

"There are very few near, just now, Sahib," replied the man. "It is only a month since there was the great drive into the kraal, and those that were let go are wild and have gone far away."

"Oh, I say, Phra, and we call this a wild country! Why, we shall have to go beetle-catching or hunting frogs."

Sree smiled, and Harry saw it.

"Well, propose something better," he cried.

"The men were at work in the new sugar plantation," said the man quietly.

"Well, we don't want to go hunting men," cried Harry impatiently.

"And the tiger leaped out of the edge of the jungle, caught the man by the shoulder, and carried him away."

"Ah!" cried Phra excitedly; "why didn't you tell us that at first?"

"Because he kept it back for the last," said Harry. "That's just his way."

"Would the Sahib and my Prince like to try and shoot the tiger?" asked Sree.

"Would we? Why, of course we would," cried Harry excitedly. "What shall we do? Have a place made in a tree?"

"No, Sahib," replied the man, shaking his head. "If it were a cow or one of the oxen, I would make a place in a tree near the spot where he had dragged the beast, for he would come back to feed upon it as soon as it grew dark; but it was not an ox nor a cow. The poor man has been taken away to the wat, and his wife and friends have paid all they could for him to be burned."

"What shall we do, then?"

"It is of no use to go without a couple of elephants and beaters to drive the tiger out."

Harry looked round at Phra, who nodded his head quietly.

"Very well," he said; "we'll have the elephants out, and men to beat. When shall we go? To-morrow?"

"Yes, my Prince; to-morrow when the tiger will be lying asleep."

"I'll go and speak to my father," said Phra. "He will not care to come himself, but your father and Doctor Cameron will be sure to say that they will come."

"Yes, of course," said Harry. "But I say, only to think of old Sree here knowing of this tiger, and not saying a word!"

"I was going to tell you, Sahib, before I went away."

"But why didn't you tell us before?"

"Because I did not know, Sahib, till a little while ago, when he came to find me and bring me the news."

He pointed as he spoke to an ordinary-looking peasant who was squatted a little way off beneath the trees, chewing his betel.

The lads had not noticed the man before, as he had shrunk away more into the shade on seeing them come out.

"He brought you the bad news?" said Phra.

"Yes, my Prince. He went to find me yonder after coming across from his village, and no one could tell him where I had gone, till at last he saw the Sahib doctor's boatmen, and they told him that I was here."

"Then I will go and tell my father we want the elephant," said Phra. "You go and speak to them indoors, for we must kill that wretch."

"If we can," said Harry, smiling; "but Mr. Stripes is sometimes rather hard to find."

Phra nodded, and went across the garden on his way to the palace, while Harry went back into the house, Mike waiting till his young master's back was turned and then handing the gun he was finishing to the old hunter.

"You may as well do this, Sree," he said; "you clean guns so much better than I can."

The old hunter smiled, as he waited to examine the points of the spears his men had been polishing, and then good-humouredly took the gun to finish after his own fashion, for there was a good deal of truth in what Mike Dunning had said.

CHAPTER VII THE BRINK OF A VOLCANO

THE boys were quite wrong in imagining that their act of escaping from the museum had passed unnoticed, for as soon as they had passed out of hearing the doctor nodded his head and threw himself back in his cane chair.

"Now we are alone," he said to Mr. Kenyon, "I may as well tell you what I have heard."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No—yes. It may be either," replied the doctor. "I would not say anything before the boys, for it might make Phra uneasy."

"And Harry?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"No, I think not. I don't believe he would give the matter a second thought."

"You are hard upon the boy," said Mr. Kenyon, rather sternly.

"Not in the least," said the doctor, smiling. "It is his nature. I don't think the matter is really of any consequence, but it would have upset Phra, who is as sensitive as a girl; and he would be

worrying himself, and thinking about it for weeks, beside exaggerating the matter on his father's account."

"What is it, then—some trouble with our friend the other king?"

"Friend, eh? I believe that if he could have his own way every European would be driven out of the country—or into the river," he added to himself—"before we were twenty-four hours older."

"What is the fresh trouble, now?"

"Nothing fresh about it, Kenyon. It is the stale old matter. Here we have two parties in the country."

"Yes, and worse still, two kings," interposed Mr. Kenyon.

"Exactly, each having his own party. The one wants to see the country progress and become prosperous and enlightened; the other for it to keep just as it was five hundred years ago; and the worst of it is nearly all the people are on the stand-still side."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon. "The old traditions and superstitions suit the indolent nature of the people."

"And the progress the King is making offends their prejudices."

"You mean the prejudices of the bonzes," said Mr. Kenyon sadly.

"Exactly; that is what I do mean, and they are getting so thick with the second king, that I sometimes begin to be afraid that we shall have trouble."

"You have had that idea for a long time now, but the reigning King holds so strong a position that his kinsman dare not rise against him. He is as gentle and amiable a man as could exist, but there is the old Eastern potentate in him still, and our friend number two knows perfectly well that if he attempted to rise he would be pretty well sure to fail, and then his head would fall as surely as if our old Harry the Eighth were on the throne."

"But would he fail? All the bonzes are on his side."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon, laughing; "and they'd tell him to go on and prosper, but they would not fight."

"No, they would not fight," said the doctor musingly.

"Do you think there is a regular conspiracy?"

"I really do sometimes, and it makes me uneasy."

"That is because you are a young married man, and fidget about your wife."

"Well, and quite naturally."

"Yes, quite naturally, of course; but when you have been here as long as I have, you will not be so nervous."

"I don't think I am nervous, Kenyon; but it would be very horrible if there should be a rising amongst the people."

"Horrible, but not likely, my dear sir."

"But if there were? I suppose I am right in looking upon ourselves as being favourites."

"Certainly."

"Well, then, should we not be among the first whom the people would attack?"

"That is quite possible, but I suppose we should defend ourselves, and be defended as well by the people who remained staunch."

"I have thought of all that, but if trouble did come it would be sudden and unexpected, and we should be taken by surprise."

"We might be, or we might have ample warning. I think the latter, for these people are very open and wanting in cunning."

"But don't you think we—or say you—having so much influence with the King, would do wisely if you warned him—told him of our suspicions?"

"No, I think not," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Why?"

"Because, quiet and studious as the King is, he happens to be very acute and observant. I feel certain that nothing goes on in the city without his being fully aware of it; and though he seems to take very little notice, I am pretty sure that nothing important takes place except under his eye, or which is not faithfully reported to him by one or other of his councillors."

"Perhaps you are right," said the doctor, "and I have been unnecessarily nervous."

"I feel sure that you have been. I would speak to him, but he might look upon it as an impertinent interference on my part in connection with private family matters. Take my advice, and let it rest. We should have ample warning and ample protection, I feel sure. But I am glad you spoke out, all the same. But bah! nonsense! You would not be hurt—you, the doctor who has done so much good among the poor people. Why, doctor, they look upon you as something more than man: they idolize you."

"For the few simple cures I have effected."

"Few? Hundreds."

"Well, hundreds, then. But what has it done?"

"Made you friends with every one in the city."

"Made me a number of bitter enemies, sir. Why, the native doctors absolutely hate me. My word! I should not like to be taken ill and become helpless. They'd never let me get well again if they had the doctoring."

"Don't be too hard on them," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Not I, my dear sir. I only speak as I think. So you would not take a step in our defence?"

"Not until we were certain that it was necessary; then as many as you like. Steps? I'd make them good long strides. But say no more: the boys are coming back, and we don't want to set them thinking about such things."

In effect, steps were heard in the verandah, and a few minutes later Harry hurried into the museum again.

"Well, boy!" cried the doctor. "What is it? you look hot."

"Tiger," said Harry eagerly.

"Where?" cried Mr. Kenyon and his visitor in a breath.

"Over yonder, by the new sugar plantation," cried Harry. "Jumped on a man and killed him. Sree has just heard the news. He told me and Phra."

"How horrible!" said Mr. Kenyon.

"Yes, and the village people sent a messenger to Sree. They want the brute killed, and we're going to have an expedition and destroy the wretch."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Kenyon drily.

"You and Mr. Cameron will come with us, of course, father?" said Harry, who was too much excited to notice the glances exchanged between the merchant and his visitor; "but I should like to have first shot, and kill the beast."

"No doubt," said the doctor drily; "but I suppose you would not wish us to give up our chances if the tiger came out our way?"

"Oh no, of course not," said Harry. Then turning to Mr. Kenyon, "You will try the new rifles the King sent to you, will you not, father?"

"When I go tiger-hunting," said Mr. Kenyon drily.

Harry felt damped by his father's manner.

"But you will go now, father?"

"What, and walk the tiger up like one would a partridge?" said Mr. Kenyon. "Certainly not, and you are not old and experienced enough yet to go tiger-shooting. It requires a great deal of nerve."

"Oh, but I don't think I should feel frightened, father."

"Perhaps not; but you would be too much excited, and might shoot the doctor. We could not spare him, Hal."

"I shouldn't, father. You taught me how to handle a gun, and if I can do that I ought to be able to handle a rifle."

"Possibly; but, as Mr. Cameron will tell you, we could not risk going on foot."

"We're not going on foot, father," cried Harry excitedly. "We're going to have two elephants, and you and doctor could go on one, and Phra and I on the other."

"Oh, that alters the case," said Mr. Cameron eagerly.

"Has the King offered to lend us elephants?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"No, father, but he will," said Harry. "Phra has gone to tell him, and he is sure to say we may have them."

"Indeed? I doubt it."

"He always lets Phra and me have anything we ask for."

"Yes, he is very indulgent to you both, my boy—too much sometimes; but I notice that there is a certain amount of wisdom in what he does. What about the rifles?"

"Well, he gave us the rifles, father."

"With certain restrictions, Hal. They were to be placed in my charge, and I was to decide when it would be right for you to use them."

"Oh yes, father, he did say that."

"Yes, and I think it was not until you and Phra had been waiting nearly two years that they were sent."

"It was a long time, certainly," agreed Harry.

"The King is a wise man in his way, and I feel pretty sure that he will refuse to lend the elephants. What do you say, Cameron?"

"I agree with you."

"What, and let the tiger lurk about that great plantation and keep on killing the poor fellows who are hoeing?" cried Harry indignantly. "I'm sure he wouldn't; he's too particular about protecting people."

"He will most likely get up a big hunt to destroy the tiger," said the doctor; "but I don't believe he will let you two boys go."

"Oh!" cried Harry, who seemed as if he could hardly contain himself in his keen disappointment; "any one would think it was wicked and contemptible to be a boy. One mustn't do this and one mustn't do that, because one is a boy. One mustn't do anything because one is a boy. It's always, 'You are too young' for what one wants to do. Oh," he cried passionately, "who'd be a boy?"

"I would, for one," said the doctor, laughing.

"I don't believe it, doctor," cried Harry. "You wouldn't like to be always kept down."

"Perhaps not; boys never do. They're too stupid."

"What!" cried Harry.

"Too stupid," said the doctor again, while Mr. Kenyon lay back in his creaking cane chair with his eyes half closed, listening, with an amused expression of countenance. "Why, I was as stupid as you are, Hal, at your age."

"But you did not think so," retorted Hal.

"Of course I did not. I did not know any better. I could not see that by being a thorough boy for so many years, and being boyish and thinking as a boy should think, I should naturally grow into a thorough manly man."

"I don't quite understand you, sir," said Harry rather distantly.

"But I'm speaking plainly enough, Hal. Come, confess, my lad; you want to be a man, and to be treated as if you were one?"

Harry hesitated.

"Speak out frankly, sir," said Mr. Kenyon sternly.

"Well, of course I do," said the lad.

"And you can't see that if we treated you as you wish to be treated," said the doctor earnestly, "that we should be weak, foolish, and indulgent, for we should be doing you harm?"

"Oh, Mr. Cameron, what nonsense!"

"Think of this some day in the future, Hal, my lad," said the doctor warmly, "and you will find then that it is not nonsense. Look here, my lad, a boy of seventeen, however advanced and able he may be in some things, is only a boy."

"Only a boy!" said Harry bitterly.

"Yes, only a boy; a young, green sapling who must pass through years before he can grow naturally into a strong, muscular man. Some boys fret over this and the restraints they undergo, because of their youth, and want to be men at once—want to throw away four or five of the golden years of their existence, and all through ignorance, because they are too blind to see how beautiful they are."

" You told me all that once before, Mr. Cameron."

" Very likely, Hal, for I am rather disposed to moralize sometimes. But it's quite true, my lad."

" Yes," said Mr. Kenyon, " it's true enough, Hal, for boys are wonderfully boyish. Naturally, too, my lad," he added, with a laugh. " But there, don't build any hopes upon this expedition, for I should certainly shrink from letting you go."

" Oh, father, I would be so careful, and I'll believe all Doctor Cameron said and won't want to be a man till I am quite grown up. I'll be as boyish as I can be."

" I think I'd shrink from any promises of that kind, Hal," said the doctor, smiling. " Don't tie yourself down to rules of your own invention. Look here, aim at being natural, at hitting the happy medium."

" I suppose that's the unhappy medium for the boy, isn't it ? "

" Not at all, my lad ; it's the way to be happy. Leave it to Nature ; she will set that right. Don't be too boyish, and don't aim at being an imitation man—in other words a prig. Be natural."

" Yes," said Mr. Kenyon ; " the doctor's right, Hal. Be natural, and you will not be far wrong there."

" I always am as natural as I can be," said Harry, throwing himself into action, and looking as gloomy and discontented as a boy could look ; " but no one gets to be so disappointed and sat upon as I am."

Mr. Kenyon's brow clouded over, but he said nothing.

" So sure as I set my mind upon anything I'm sure to be balked."

" Poor fellow ! " said the doctor gravely.

" Yes, Doctor, it's all very well for you to make fun of me. You can do just as you like."

" Of course," said the doctor gravely, " and I see that does make a difference. One sees things from such a different point of view."

" Yes, that you do," said Harry.

" Exactly," continued the doctor slowly, " and you see, as you say, I do exactly as I like, have everything I wish for, never suffer the slightest trouble, enjoy the most robust health, am as rich as a man need wish to be ; in fact, I am the happiest man under the sun."

" Are you, Doctor ? " said Harry. " I'm glad of it. I didn't know it was so good as that."

" And, of course, that is about how you'd like to be, eh, Hal ? "

" Well," said the boy, hesitating, " something like that—I—er—I—I don't want to be greedy."

" Don't want to be greedy ? " cried the doctor, changing his manner, as he sprang up and began to pace the museum. " Why, you miserable, discontented young cub ! There is not one boy in a thousand leads such a life as you do : a good home, surrounded by friends, with plenty of time for study, and plenty of time for the necessary amusement. Yours, sir, is an ideal life ; but it has spoilt you, and I'm afraid it is from having a too indulgent father."

"Oh, come, Cameron, I must speak in my own defence," said Mr. Kenyon.

"And you ought to speak in mine too, father," cried Harry indignantly, as he gazed at the doctor with blazing eyes and flaming cheeks.

"I can't, Hal," said his father, smiling ; "there's so much truth in what he says, my boy, and your words were uncalled for—unjust."

"I beg your pardon, Kenyon," said the doctor ; "I had no business to speak as I did. I had no right. But I'm such a hot-headed Scotsman, and Master Hal here put me out."

"There is no begging pardon needed," said Mr. Kenyon quietly.

"You see, I could not help comparing Hal's lot with mine—a poor, raw lad on the west coast who lived on potatoes and porridge, with a broiled herring or haddie once in a way for a treat. But there, once more, I had no right to interfere."

"I say, granted, and thanks."

"Then I shan't beg your pardon, Hal, boy," cried the doctor, "for I honestly believe what I say is the truth. Take it all as so many pills, and if you'll come along the river to my place to-morrow morning I'll give you a draught as well—to do you good, my dear boy—to do you good."

"I think I've had physic enough," said Harry sulkily.

"And you don't seem to like the taste, eh ?" said the doctor, laughing. "Never mind ; it will, as people say, do you good. You will be sure to have some bit of luck to take the taste out of your mouth—a bit of sugary pleasure, my lad. Aha ! and here it comes in the shape of friend, Phra, the prince, who, king's son as he is, does not enjoy a single advantage more than you."

"Doctor !" cried Harry indignantly. "He has only to speak to have everything he wants. No one could be better off than he is. Look, he's in a hurry to tell us all about the expedition for to-morrow. Oh, it is so disappointing, for I wanted so badly to shoot a tiger. It set me longing when Phra and I looked at those skins to-day."

"Dear me ! what a thirst for blood you are developing, Hal !" said the doctor, as Mr. Kenyon still sat back in his chair, looking pained, while his son carefully avoided gazing in his direction. "I should have thought you had killed enough for one day."

"Well, Phra ?" cried Harry, as his companion came straight in.

"Well ?" said the boy, with a mocking smile.

"What did your father say ?"

Phra was silent for a few moments, and then he spoke quietly.

"That I was too much of a boy yet to think of going after tigers," said the lad slowly, and then he started and frowned. For the doctor had thrown himself back in one of the cane chairs, which gave vent to a peculiar squeaking noise, while its occupier rocked himself to and fro, literally roaring with laughter.

"I am very sorry if I have said some ridiculous thing, sir," said Phra gravely. "I speak English as well as I can."

"Ridiculous thing!" cried the doctor, springing up and seizing the young Siamese by the shoulders; "why, it was splendid. Look at him," he cried, half-choking with laughter, "look at Hal! Oh, dear me, how you have made my sides ache!"

"But I don't understand," said Phra.

"Then you soon shall," cried the doctor. "My lord there has been in a tantrum because—because—oh, dear me, I shall be able to speak directly."

Phra looked in a puzzled way from the laughing doctor to his friend, who sat frowning and biting his lips.

"Because," continued the doctor, "Mr. Kenyon here has told him that he should not like him to go to the tiger hunt."

"Mr. Kenyon told him so?" cried Phra quickly.

"Yes, because he is too young."

"Oh, I am so glad," cried Phra, showing his white teeth.

Harry started as if he had received a blow.

"What!" he cried fiercely.

"I say I am so glad, because that is just what my father said to me."

"And very wisely too, Phra, my boy," said Mr. Kenyon, rising. "You lads had better wait a bit longer before you indulge in a sport which is very risky even to one mounted upon an elephant, especially if the elephant is timid. I have known several bad accidents occur through the poor creature becoming unmanageable from a wounded beast's charge."

"It's disappointing, sir," said Phra; "but I suppose father's right."

"Of course he is, and I'm glad to see you take it so wisely."

The speaker laid his hand on the doctor's arm, and they went out into the verandah.

"Ah, Kenyon, you spoil that boy with indulgence."

"Think so?"

"Yes; I don't like to hear a lad like that speak as he did to you. It was that made me fire up. But there, I'm sorry if I've done wrong."

"You have not done wrong," said Mr. Kenyon, "and I am rather glad you spoke as you did. But you do not understand Hal so well as I do."

"Naturally I do not."

"He is a queer boy, with a good many things about him that I don't like; but he has some oddities that I do like. I dare say he will display one of them before you go."

"He will have to be quick about it, then," said the doctor, smiling, "for I have not much longer to stay."

"Plenty of time for him to show the stuff he is made of. I'm sorry to disappoint the boys, though."

"And ourselves too, for I should have liked the jaunt, and the

more of those savage beasts we can destroy the better. What do you say to going over to the palace and asking the old gentleman to let us have the use of the elephants and beaters?"

"No," said Mr. Kenyon, "I could not do that under the circumstances. It would be too hard upon the boys. Yes, Michael?"

"There is a man from—one of the gentlemen from the King to see you, sir," said the man.

"Indeed? I will come. Come too, Cameron; I daresay it will interest you."

The messenger had come to ask Mr. Kenyon if he would take charge of a little expedition to be made against a tiger that had been destroying life in the neighbourhood, and to say that as matters were so serious the King would be greatly obliged if he would go.

"I don't like to say No, and I don't want to say Yes," said Mr. Kenyon.

"I do not see how you can refuse."

"Neither do I," said Mr. Kenyon thoughtfully, and he sent a note back, promising to undertake the task.

Hardly had the messenger departed before Harry came hurriedly into the room, but started on seeing the doctor there.

"I thought you had gone, sir," he said. "I made sure I heard the door swing to."

"No, I have not gone, Hal," said the doctor, smiling good-humouredly; "but I'll soon be off, if you want to speak to your father alone."

"I did, sir; but it doesn't matter your being here."

"What is it, Hal?" said Mr. Kenyon gravely.

"Wanted to tell you I feel horribly ashamed of myself, father," said Harry quickly.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, it seems so queer that such a chap as Phra should behave like a gentleman over a bit of disappointment, while I—I—well, I behaved like a disagreeable boy."

"But very naturally, Hal," said the doctor. "Better than acting like a make-believe man."

"Thank you, Hal," said Mr. Kenyon quietly, holding out his hand. "Has Phra gone?"

"No, father."

"Tell him that his father has sent requesting me to take charge of an expedition against the tiger, and that I am sorry I cannot ask you two lads to go with me."

"All right, father; he won't mind. I don't now."

Harry nodded at the doctor, and went out of the room, while his father waited till his steps had ceased, and a door had swung to.

"Odd boy, isn't he, Cameron?" said Mr. Kenyon then.

"Very odd chap," replied the doctor. "But I like boys to be odd like that."

CHAPTER VIII
A PROWL BY WATER

IT was disappointing and hard for two boys to bear, situated as they had been—singled out by the old hunter as the first receivers of the news ; but they had determined to be heroic over it, and after a fashion they were.

“ Don’t let’s seem to mind it the least bit in the world, Phra,” Harry said.

“ What shall we do ? go up the river ? ”

“ Go up the river ? No. Let’s see them start, and help them with their guns when they mount the elephants. They’ll be watching to see how we look, and we’re going to puzzle them.”

“ But will not that look queer ? ”

“ I dunno,” said Harry, “ and I don’t care ; but that’s what I’ve made up my mind to do. What do you mean to do ? ”

“ The same as you do,” said Phra firmly.

The result was that at the time appointed Harry walked up to the court by the palace main entrance, shouldering one of the rifles, and there his heart failed him for a moment or two, but he was himself again directly.

For the sight of the two huge elephants with their howdahs, and their mahouts with their legs hidden beneath the huge beasts’ ears, each holding his anchus—the short, heavy, spear-like goad with hook which takes the place of whip, spur, and reins, in the driving of the huge beasts—was almost too much for him.

There was a party, too, of pretty well fifty spearmen to act as beaters, some of whom were furnished with small gongs. Altogether it formed a goodly show, and it sent the sting of disappointment pretty deeply into the boys’ breasts, so that they had to bear up bravely to keep a good face on the matter.

The King was there to see the start made, after Mr. Kenyon, with Sree for his attendant, had mounted one of the elephants by means of a bamboo ladder, the doctor and a trusted old hunter in the King’s service perching themselves upon the other.

Then the King wished them both good fortune, the word was given, and half the spearmen marched off in front ; the elephants at a word from their mahouts shuffled after, side by side, and the remainder of the spearmen followed, passing out of the gateway.

The King said a few words to the boys, and then retired, leaving them alone in the yard with the armed men on guard.

“ Shall we follow them part of the way ? ” said Phra then.

“ No, that wouldn’t do,” replied Harry. “ It was right to come and show that we weren’t going to mind ; but if we followed now, I know what my father would think.”

“ What ? ” said Phra abruptly.

"That we were following in the hope of being asked to get on the elephants. It would be too mean."

"Yes," said Phra, "of course. I did not think of that. Well, what shall we do?"

"I dunno. Lie down and go to sleep till they come back; that's the best way to forget it all."

"Bah! I'm not going to do that. I know: get over the river in a boat, and go and see the big Wat."

"What for? Who wants to see the old place again, with its bonzes, with their yellow robes and shaven heads?"

"We could go up the great tower again."

"Nice job to climb all the way up those steps in a hot time like this! What's the good?"

Phra looked at him and smiled.

"You could take the telescope up, and see for miles."

"But I don't want to carry that lumpy thing up those hundreds of steps."

"I'd carry it."

"But I don't want you to carry it, and I don't want to see for miles. I can see quite as much as I want to-day without the telescope. I don't feel as if I want to see at all. It was quite right, I suppose, for us to be left at home, and proper for us to come and make a show of not minding; but now the excitement's all over, and they're gone, I feel just as if I could howl."

"What! cry?" said Phra wonderingly.

"No—ooo! Howl—shout with rage. I want to quarrel with some one and hit him."

"Well, quarrel with and hit me."

"Shan't. I should hurt you."

"Well, hurt away. I won't hit back."

"Then I shan't be such a coward. Here, I know: I'll go and take that chap's spear away, and break it."

He nodded his head towards one of the guards on duty close to the entrance of the palace.

"What for?"

"Because I'm in a rage," said Harry between his teeth. "Oh, I could do that, and then run at another and knock him down, and then yell and shout, and throw stones at those great vases, and break the china squares over the doorway. I feel just like those Malay fellows must when they get in one of their mad tempers and run *amok*."

"Why don't you, then?" said Phra mockingly.

"Because I can't," cried Harry bitterly.

"Can't? Why, it would be easy enough. You could go and break the spears of all the guards, and take their kries away. They wouldn't dare to hurt you, seeing what a favourite you are with my father."

"I know all that," said Harry, snapping his teeth together.

"Then why can't you do it?" said Phra mockingly. "Go on; run *amok*."

"Shan't—can't."

"Why can't you?"

"Because I'm English, and I've got to fight it all down, and I'm going to, savage as it makes me feel. Here, what shall we do?"

"Go right up to the highest window in the big tower of the Wat over yonder, and take the telescope up with us."

"I tell you I don't want to. There's nothing to see there that we haven't seen scores of times."

"Yes, there is."

"No, there isn't."

"Yes, there is, I tell you."

"Well, what is there?"

"We could watch and follow them with the glass nearly all the way to the new sugar plantation, and perhaps see the tiger hunt."

Harry started excitedly, and caught his friend by the arm.

"So we could," he said, with his face lighting up. "I needn't go back for our glass; you could get one from your father; he'd let you have that if he wouldn't let you have the elephants."

"Yes. Shall I fetch it?"

"No," cried Harry sharply; "I won't take any more notice of the hunting; we'll do something else."

"But you'd like to see it," said Phra.

"Of course I should, but I won't. There."

"But it's like—what do you call it when you're doing something to hurt yourself?"

"Hurting myself," said Harry bluntly.

"No, no, no. Ah, I've got it. Biting your own nose off in revenge of your face."

"All right, that's what I'm going to do—bite it off. I won't watch them going, and I won't take any more notice of the miserable, disappointing business."

"Oh, Hal, what a temper you're in!"

"I know that, but I'm fighting it all the time, and I mean to win."

"But you'll be obliged to be here when they come back."

"No, I shan't; I won't hear them."

"You can't help it; they'll come marching back, banging the gongs and tomtomming and shouting, with the tiger slung on the back of one elephant, and the doctor and your father in the same howdah. Oh, you'll be obliged to come and meet them."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Harry, drawing a deep breath. "If I don't, they'll think me sulky."

"So you are," said Phra, laughing.

"I'm not; no, not a bit, only in a temper."

"I wish the cricket and football things had come."

"I don't believe they ever will come," said Harry. "See what time it is."

"They will come," said Phra gravely.

"How do you know?"

"Because my father said that we should have them. There, you're better now."

"No, I'm not; I'm ever so much worse," said Harry, through his set teeth.

"Well, let's go and kill something; you'll be better then."

"Don't believe I should," replied Harry. "What should we go and kill?"

"I don't know. Let's get the guns and make two of the men row us up the narrow stream, right up yonder through the jungle where the best birds are. Your father would like it if we got some good specimens ready for Sree to skin."

"Very well," said Harry resignedly; "I shan't mind so long as you don't want me to go up the big temple tower to watch them. I say, Phra, I'm beginning to feel a bit better now."

Phra laughed, and the two boys went into the palace, where the former gave an order to one of the servants about a boat, and then led the way to his own room, a charming little library with a couple of stands on one side bearing guns and weapons of various kinds, beside fishing-rods and a naturalist's collecting gear.

"Which gun will you have?" asked Phra.

"Either; I don't care," was the reply; and by the time they were prepared one of the attendants announced that the boat was ready.

They walked down to the great stone landing-place at the river, stepped into the boat, and seated themselves under the little open-sided roof, while their two rowers pushed off, and keeping close in shore, where the eddy was in their favour, sent the boat rapidly on through the muddy water.

For some distance the forest lay back away from the river, while the bank on their right was pretty well hidden by a continuous mass of house-boats, so close together as almost to touch; but at last these were left behind, and the trees on their left began to encroach upon the fields and fruit gardens, where melons, pines and bananas grew in wonderful profusion, and the air was full of life such as would have delighted an entomologist.

By degrees cultivation ceased and the wild jungle came close down to the stream, and in places even overhung and dipped the tips of branches in the water. Now and then, a small crocodile scuttled off the muddy bank and plunged into the river. Fish began to be more plentiful, little shoals showing on the surface, and in two or three places a heavy fellow springing out in pursuit of its prey and falling back with a splash.

Birds, too, began to be seen: tiny parrots whistled and chattered in the trees; a big hawk hovered overhead; and several times over great long-legged waders were disturbed.

But no attempt at firing was made, the two lads sitting quiet and thoughtful beneath their sheltering roof, musing over the expedition, and wondering whether it was being successful.

In imagination Harry seemed to see it all : the men spread out to beat some fairly open space and drive the tiger towards where the two elephants would be stationed some fifty yards apart, with their occupants, rifle in hand, watching for the slightest movement in a clump of bushes or tuft of reeds.

"Oh, what would I not give to be there !" said Harry to himself at last. "I wish I were not such a boy !"

The colour came a little, though, into his cheeks—or it might have been caused by the heat of the sun, at any rate it was there—as he thought of what the doctor had said, and of his own words to his father.

And as these thoughts came, he felt something like shame at his feeling of dissatisfaction with what he had, and his striving after that which he had not.

"I won't be such a dissatisfied donkey," he muttered, and his face looked brighter as he turned sharply to speak to Phra.

His change affected his companion, who brightened up too.

"We're getting close to the mouth of the little river," he said.

"I'm glad of it," said Harry cheerfully. "I say, they have been quick ; it's hot work for them."

"Yes," said Phra, "but they'll have a good rest soon while we're going slowly, and there will be nothing to do but steer, going back."

"I say, suppose they get back first with the tiger."

"I hope they will not," cried Phra ; "but it isn't likely. They've a long way to go, and the beating will take a long time. We shall be back first. Ugh, you brute !" he whispered, reaching for his gun, cocking both barrels softly, and taking aim at a large crocodile.

Snip ! snap ! and then a splash, as the reptile disappeared.

"I don't think you have killed it," said Harry seriously, but with his eyes dancing with mischief.

"Ah, you're better," cried Phra pettishly. "You don't want to run *amok* now. How could I be so stupid ! I never thought about not being loaded."

"Better think about it now," said Harry, beginning the operation in the tedious, old-fashioned way that ruled so long before the cartridge was invented for a sportsman's use. "But we were only to shoot birds, I thought."

"Yes, birds, and only beautiful specimens," replied Phra. "I couldn't help being tempted to fire at the brute, though. I shall always be shooting at them now."

"Here we are," said Harry, and at a word from Phra the light sampan was guided into a sluggish side stream only some twenty yards or so wide, while on either side the trees rose like a wall of verdure, the water lapping the leaves, which dipped and played up and down with the motion of the stream.

"You take that side and I'll take this," said Phra ; and then giving the order to the rower in front, the man ceased paddling and made his way right astern, to squat down on the little platform beside his fellow, who cleverly propelled and steered the light craft with his one oar, leaving the look-out forward free for the gunners.

"Hullo! How are you, old gentleman?" cried Harry suddenly, as a grey-bearded, venerable-looking little face was suddenly thrust out through the leaves, so that its owner could look down at the strange visitors to his wild home.

There was a sharp chattering, the head of the monkey was drawn back, and then a rustling and waving of the boughs on the left began, going on a little in front.

"There's a whole troop of them travelling along," said Harry.

"Yes, and they'll scare all the birds," cried Phra. "Look, they've startled those lovely parroquets. What's to be done?"

"They'll soon go," replied Harry. "Row away."

The man astern thrust the boat along with his easy, Venice-like manipulation of the oar, and the light boat glided on right in the centre of the beautiful green lane with its watery floor; but the wave as it seemed to be likewise glided along, with a peculiar rustle in the foliage some twenty yards in front.

There was not a sound beside, save when, further ahead, some parroquet darted out with a shriek to cross to the other side of the stream, or a sharp flapping of wings told that it was a dove darting frantically through the twigs to escape from enemies with a great love for eggs, and no objection to savoury, plump morsels in the shape of half-fledged young, by way of change from a fruit diet.

"Let's stop," said Phra, on seeing that the undulation in the green wall on their left kept on at about the same rate.

"Stop, and let them go on?" said Harry. "Very well."

At a word the man ceased paddling, the boat glided on from the impetus already given, but less and less fast, till completely overcome by the stream it was meeting, it gradually came to a standstill, and was on the point of giving way and being borne back, when Harry burst into a hearty laugh, which had the result of making the grey, inquiring face of the monkey that had just peered out, pop back again.

"Row," said Phra, "and keep the boat stationary."

The rower dipped his oar gently, and the boat ceased to retrograde.

"What rum little customers they are!" said Harry, as he watched the place where the grey head had disappeared. "Just like a little old man watching us. Think they're gone now?"

"No; look."

Harry was looking, and saw at the same moment the little face cautiously thrust out again, but withdrawn as he made a threatening movement with his gun.

Then all was perfectly still for a minute.

"Perhaps they're gone now," said Harry.

"No; they are too inquisitive. I daresay there are fifty of them hidden in among the boughs."

"I think they're gone," said Harry at the end of another minute.

"Well, try. Go on," said Phra, and the oar was once more silently plied, gently disturbing the water, while at the same moment

the wave in the trees began again, with its gentle rustling, showing that the monkey troop was once more travelling along just in front, scaring the birds away as they advanced.

The boat was stopped again, and the monkeys followed suit, the same curious old face peering cautiously out and watching.

The boat went on, so did the monkeys ; and this was repeated over and over again, stopping and going on, the wave in the trees seeming to be so exactly influenced by the rowers' agitation of the water that it was as if one touch moved both water and leaf.

"Well, they are comical little beggars," cried Harry, who was once more in the highest of spirits. "I say, old man, just take your friends away ; we're going shooting. Do you hear ?"

The little head popped in out of sight, but as the boat did not move it popped out again, as if to find the reason why.

"We shan't get a bird, for they'll keep on like that for miles."

"It's tiresome," said Harry. "Here, I say, if you don't toddle I'll give you pepper."

The gun was raised threateningly as the boy spoke, and the head disappeared.

"He knows English," cried Harry, "and he's an uncommonly sensible old gentleman. Father told me that the country folks at home say rooks can smell powder. So can monkeys, seemingly."

"Country folks at home ? What country folks ?"

"Not yours ; ours, in the old home, England. There, let's get on and begin shooting, or we shall get nothing."

"It doesn't matter," said Phra quietly ; "it's very beautiful gliding along without killing things."

"Yes, but as we came to get specimens, let's get a few. I want to, so as to show father and the doctor that we haven't been moping. Row away."

The man smiled, and sent the boat gliding up the bright stream again, for the sun was so nearly overhead that scarcely any shadow was cast on their left.

But the moment the boat moved the wave ran along the trees again, and Phra laughed aloud at his companion's face.

"Yes, you may laugh, but it's too bad. There, I'll keep my word, though, and as soon as my grey-headed gentleman shows his face I'm going to pepper him with small shot."

"No, you're not," said Phra, laughing. "You don't want him for a specimen."

"No, of course not. I don't want to shoot him. It would be just like killing a little old man. I'll only pepper him so as to scare him and his friends away. They'll spoil all our fun."

"Hi ! Look out, Hal !"

There was a great flapping of wings and a loud rushing sound, as two large birds dashed out from where the troop of monkeys were passing, to fly across the river to the trees on the other side. But before they were two-thirds of the way across a couple of reports followed rapidly one after the other, and the birds fell

in the water, which one of them beat with its wings for a few moments, and then became motionless, floating down towards the boat, which was dexterously driven on to meet them.

The birds were carefully lifted in, and with their plumage smoothed down, laid in a kind of locker, proving to be a finely developed pair of the great hornbills, no beauties as far as feathering was concerned, but singular as specimens, from the enormous development of their bills, and the great addition in form which has earned for them the sobriquet of rhinoceros.

"That's capital," said Harry. "Father was saying he wanted a good specimen or two, for ours were very poor."

The boys were loading again now, and the boat was once more advancing.

"The monkeys did not drive those away," said Phra.

"No; just drove them out right for us. Did as well as dogs, but——Hullo! where are they?"

The boys stared up at the great green wall on their left, but the trees were motionless in the hot sunshine, not a leaf stirring, the only movement visible being in one spot where a gigantic wreath of some flowering creeper hung down from far on high, spreading to the sunshine hundreds of trumpet-shaped white blossoms, and among these somewhere about a score of tiny sun-birds were hovering and darting, the brilliant, metallic, scale-like plumage of head and breast looking as if the diminutive creatures wore helmet and gorget of wonderfully tinted and burnished metals, others approaching in lustre the polish of brilliant gems.

It was a beautiful sight as the little creatures darted about, their rapidly beating wings almost invisible, but giving the birds the appearance of being surrounded by a soft haze. Here one would be apparently motionless beneath a hanging blossom, into which its long thin beak was thrust to probe the nectar like a gigantic bee. There a couple would be engaged in chase and flight, with flash after flash of metallic light reflected from the surface of their plumage as they darted about in full career, turning different portions of their plumage to the sun's rays. Again one would seem to be of the most sober colours, almost dingy, till it moved, and then as it caught the light at some other angle it flashed into a thing of beauty, dazzling in its tints of ruby, sapphire, and purple.

The boys had seen these tiny representatives of the humming birds in the New World scores of times, but always found satisfaction in watching them, and for the time being the monkeys were forgotten.

"What a chance!" said Harry, as the boat was sent in close to the burdened tree without disturbing the sun-birds in the least. "If father wants any more specimens of these, we couldn't come to a better place."

"But next time we come by, that bush will not be in flower, and there will be no sun-birds there."

"But they would be somewhere else," said Harry philosophically. "Look at that one with the red band across his breast. What a

beauty ! I say, next time we want any I vote that we don't shoot them with sand or water, but try a butterfly net."

"Couldn't reach," said Phra.

"Could if we had it at the end of a long bamboo."

"No," said Phra decisively ; "you could not handle it quickly enough then. It would be too clumsy, and the bird would be as quick again. Couldn't do it, Hal."

"S'pose not," said the boy thoughtfully. "I say, look at that one with the rose-coloured head."

"Am looking at it. I don't think I ever saw such a beauty."

"Oh dear !" said Harry, with a deep sigh.

"What's the matter ?"

"I was thinking what poor, stupid things our stuffed skins are. They don't look a bit like these tiny beauties all in motion, and seeming to be a fresh colour every time they move. They're so soft and round, and so quick. And see how they fly, too. I say, Phra, it seems a shame to shoot them."

"Horrible ! Nothing could be more beautiful," said Phra, thoughtfully.

"Humming-birds are more beautiful," observed Harry.

"Ever seen any ?"

"No, but my father says they are. He has seen them stuffed, and they are so beautiful then that they must be wonderfully lovely alive."

"Let's go on," said Phra thoughtfully. "Perhaps we shall get another shot or two, in spite of the monkeys."

The man set the boat gliding on again, and Harry sat with his gun cocked, waiting to see the little grey face peer out from among the leaves.

"I wouldn't pepper him, Harry," said Phra.

"Not going to," was the reply. "I've only put some powder to frighten him."

"That's right ; but I don't see anything moving."

"They'll show themselves directly. Then we'll stop, and when the little old fellow shows his face I'll fire."

But the shots already fired had been sufficient, sending the troop away through the trees at the quickest pace they could command, and the two boys looked in vain.

Soon after, they had capital chances at different kinds of parrots, but did not lift their guns, these birds being abundant, and the little museum amply supplied with their skins ; but upon coming abreast of an opening, the boat stopped, for it seemed a likely place for something novel.

"Hist !" whispered Phra, pointing. "That's a bird you've not shot yet."

"Yes, like the one you missed that day. Let me try for this one. —How tiresome ! it's gone in beneath the bushes."

It was evidently a bird of secretive habit, for it had dived into a dense place ; but just as Harry was about to give up, and tell the

man to go on, the bird came into sight again, rose from the top of a low tree, and was in the act of flying across the opening, when Harry raised his gun quickly and fired.

"Down?" he said. "I couldn't see for the smoke."

"No," said Phra; "it flew right away yonder."

"Oh, it couldn't; I took such a careful aim. Did you see it?" he asked the men.

They both replied in the affirmative, and Harry looked puzzled.

"It seems queer," he said, beginning to reload his gun. "I don't know how I could have missed."

"I know," cried Phra. "You loaded to frighten the monkey."

"And did not put any shot in!" cried Harry. "Oh, how stupid!"

At that moment Phra raised his gun and fired at a similar bird, as it crossed the river, and dropped just at the edge of the opening.

A turn or two of the oar sent the boat alongside, the bird was retrieved, and Harry was in ecstasies with its beautiful shades of turquoise blue, pale drab, and grey.

"It's the kind father was saying he was so eager to get a specimen of," cried Harry. "Do you think any more will come if we wait?"

"I don't think so," was the reply; "but let's try."

They waited for half an hour, but not another bird appeared, and they went on, having the luck to bring down one of the lovely ground thrushes at the next opening.

After this Phra shot one of the scarlet-breasted trogons, a beautiful insect-eating bird, nearly allied to our goatsuckers and cuckoos, with, in addition to its rosy, scarlet breast, a delicate pencilling of grey and black, while the greater part of its back was of a fine metallic green.

Flycatchers with inordinately long tails were the next trophies, and Harry was beginning to think that enough had been secured for Sree to skin and preserve, when Phra pressed his companion's arm, and pointed to what looked like a streak of vivid blue being drawn in the air just above the water.

It was too far off to fire, so the boys strained their eyesight to note where the beautiful object settled, but without result, so the boat was urged gently forward, and, finger on trigger, the boys watched the spot where they had last seen the bird.

"It has a splendid tail, Hal," said Phra, in a whisper. "You had better fire."

"No, you; it's a beauty."

"Then you fire; you are so much surer than I am. I'll hold my shot in case you don't bring it down."

They were in momentary expectation of seeing the bird rise to continue its flight up the watery way; but there was no sign of it, and the lads were getting in despair, when there was a flash from a spot least expected. Phra, in his excitement at seeing it going away without Harry getting a good view of it, fired, though it seemed to be too late. However, the bird fell into the river, and

another rose at the report, skimmed along just above the surface, and was getting almost beyond range, when Harry drew trigger, and the bird dropped.

"I shan't shoot any more to-day," said Harry excitedly, as the two birds were retrieved and laid for their plumage to dry, being two perfect specimens of the racket-tailed kingfisher, whose azure adornments render it one of the most lovely birds of that part of the world. "I say, what beauties! We have done well."

"We've shot those bird often," said Phra, as he raised one of the kingfishers by the beak, and drew it softly through his hand, removing part of the water which remained, and straightening the produced feathers of the tail, each with its narrow almost naked shaft ending in a lovely blue ellipse of web. This done, he laid the damp bird in the sunshine to dry, adding, "But I don't think we ever shot better specimens, or hurt the plumage so little."

A low, hissing noise drew the boys' attention to the man who was not rowing, and, as he caught their eyes, he pointed to something in one of the overhanging trees.

"What is it?" said Harry; "I can't see;" and he cocked his piece, quite forgetting his words of a short time before.

"Only nests," said Phra; "we don't want them."

In effect there was a cluster of about a dozen pensile nests, formed like a chemist's retort by the clever bird-weavers, and hanging neck downward from the ends of thin branches, where they were perfectly safe from the intrusion of active, long-armed monkeys.

There was, in fact, something attractive at every few yards, for when birds were not in sight magnificent butterflies or day-flying moths came flitting out of the openings into the forest, one of which was the atlas, as much as ten inches across the wings.

And now the tension of seeking for choice specimens being over, the boys sat back carelessly, watching the various objects which came into view. Now it would be fish, temptingly suggestive of the sport that might be had up this lovely stream, did they feel disposed to bring tackle. A little farther on the boat was stopped for a cluster of beautiful orchids to be secured, but they were rejected on account of their being inhabited by a colony of virulent ants.

"I say," said Harry suddenly, "this would be just the place for fireflies. Let's tell Dr. Cameron, and we'll have a trip up some night. We might shoot some of the queer night birds."

"Yes," said Phra, "and something else too. There are tigers up here, they say."

"So much the better. We should get a chance to shoot one then by accident. I say, where should we come to if we kept right on as far as the river ran?"

"To the place it started from."

"Well, I know that; but where is it?"

"Oh, it's all our country. There are mountains there, and plenty of elephants, Sree says."

"Let's have an expedition right up then, and bring a tent and plenty of provisions. We ought to be able to get all kinds of new specimens."

"I'm willing," said Phra; "but hadn't we better turn back now?"

"Think they will be coming back from the tiger hunt?"

"Most likely. I say, Hal, it hasn't been a bad time, has it?"

"No," said Harry with a sigh. "Tell him to go back."

At the order the man who had been resting returned to the fore part of the boat, and seized his oar, making that the stern now, while his companion laid in his oar, and squatted down for his rest.

"Hullo! look!" cried Harry; "there's another of those queer-looking old chaps," and he nodded in the direction of the other side of the river, where it was evident that a fresh troop of the quaint little animals were travelling along in the trees. They were going up the river, but as soon as they found that the boat was retiring they at once altered their direction, and the foliage waved and trembled as they kept alongside, travelling through the dense jungle about five-and-twenty feet above the ground, and very rarely giving the occupants of the boat a chance of seeing their lithe, active forms.

How far these eager, inquisitive little fellows would have followed them, if left undisturbed, it is impossible to say; but after watching their movements and the eager, excited face of their leader for some time, Harry grew tired of their company.

"Send a shot over them, Phra," he cried.

The boy raised his gun, pistol fashion, in the air, and fired it, while Harry watched the wall of verdure.

Just as the gun was fired the little old face of the leader was being reached out from the extremities of the boughs, the monkey holding on in what proved to be a very precarious position, for the suddenness of the report frightened it out of its small wits, and made it give such a bound that the next moment, collapsed into what looked like a ball fringed with white, it came rushing through the leaves, splash into the water, making the occupants of the boat roar with laughter.

"What is fun to you is death to us," said the frogs to the boys, in the fable, and this was nearly the case with the monkey.

For as soon as the rower saw the beginning of the mishap he gave a tremendous sweep with his oar, changing the direction of the boat and giving it greater speed at the same time, so that it might glide in close to where the trees dipped, and pick up the monkey before it was drowned or succeeded in dragging itself up.

The movement was cleverly conceived and carried out, but it had a different culmination from that which was expected.

Full of excitement now, the boys were watching for the monkey to rise from its deep plunge, and so well had the boatman judged his distance that the swiftly moving prow was within a yard of the little unfortunate when it rose to the surface.

At the same moment the gaping, teeth-armed jaws of a crocodile shot out of the water, and the next would have closed upon the delicate mouthful, had not the prow of the sampan struck the reptile full on the shoulder with a tremendous shock which made the boat quiver, while from the shape of the prow and the force with which it was going, the boat rose and scraped right over the reptile's back, gliding down on the other side amidst a tremendous turmoil in the water.

The boys held on by the sides, fully expecting to be capsized, but not a drop of water was shipped, and when they turned to look back it was to see that the unoccupied man had snatched at the monkey and lifted it on board, while the crocodile, a creature of about twelve or fourteen feet long, was lashing the water into a foam with its tail.

"Here, take us back," cried Harry. "I must have a shot at that brute."

The man reversed the movement of the oar he handled, and the sampan began to glide back.

"Mind!" said Phra excitedly. "It will be horrible if we are capsized."

"I'll capsize him as soon as I get close enough," said Harry between his teeth, and he knelt ready in the boat, as it approached nearer and nearer.

The monkey seemed to be in an utter state of collapse from fear, as it crouched in its captor's lap, huddled into a drenched ball, till it caught sight of the crocodile, when it was literally transformed.

In an instant its eyes were flashing and teeth bare at the sight of its hereditary enemy, the murderer of hundreds of the unfortunates which from time to time played and slipped, or descended to the ends of branches to drink from the river; its dull state of helpless weakness had gone, and before the man who held it could grasp what was about to happen, the little creature uttered a shrieking, chattering cry of anger, bounded to the end of the sampan, and raged at the reptile.

That was enough. The crocodile responded to the angry challenge and monkey-like, violent language apparently being heaped upon it, and made a dash at the sampan; but as it reached the prow the monkey bounded on to the top of the palm-leaf roofing, while, reaching backward, Harry discharged his piece right between the reptile's eyes.

Firing as he did, with the muzzle of his piece not above a yard away, the effect of the charge of small shot was much the same as would have been that of a heavy bullet the diameter of the fowling-piece's bore.

The rower was on his guard too, and as the lad fired he forced the light sampan away so that they were quite clear of the violent blow given by the creature's tail, as it swung itself round and then sank like a stone.

The effect upon the monkey was again startling to a degree.

At the report of the gun it leapt upward from the roof of the shelter, and instead of coming down in the same place it dropped on all-fours close to Harry, who caught it by one arm.

"Mind," cried Phra warningly; "they can bite very sharply."

"Oh, I don't think he'll hurt, poor little chap," was the reply, and the boy drew his little prisoner close to him, laid down his gun, and patted its shoulder. "Shall we keep it as a pet?"

"No," said Phra; "it would pine away and die. You must get a young one if you want them to keep."

"Yes, of course," said Harry. "Isn't he comic? I wish I'd got something to give him. He's ready to make friends."

"So he ought to be," said Phra; "we saved his life. That croc. would have swallowed him like we do Doctor Cameron's pills."

"That he would. What a narrow squeak! I say, have you got anything you can give him?"

"No, give him his liberty."

"I'm going to. Poor little wretch, how he shivers! He's too much frightened to bite or do anything. Hi! old gentleman, get up there on the top."

He lifted the monkey up, and it went slowly on to the hot roof, gazing back at its captor with wondering eyes.

"Now run the boat in close to the trees," said Harry, as he patted and stroked the utterly cowed prisoner.

The next moment the open, cabin-like construction was brushing against the palm leaves with a loud, rustling sound.

This seemed to galvanize the little creature into life, and it uttered a loud *chick, chick, chack!*

This was answered by a chorus from above; for, unnoticed by the occupants of the boat, the trees had been in quiet motion all the while as they glided down.

That was enough; the monkey seized the twigs nearest to it and the next minute had swung itself up out of sight. There was a tremendous chattering, which grew distant as if the troop was hurrying through the trees in one direction, while the boat was gliding swiftly down in the other, and then Harry said laughingly,—

"Well, he might have been a bit more grateful; never so much as said *Thank ye.*"

"I think he was wonderfully grateful, for he did not bite. I say, though, how careful one has got to be about the crocodiles. I turned quite cold, for I thought we were going over."

"I felt a bit queer," said Harry thoughtfully. "If I were your father I'd offer a reward for every crocodile that was killed in the river. They're no good, and they must do a deal of mischief in the course of the year."

"Let's tell him so," said Phra, smiling. "Perhaps he will."

The journey back was beautiful enough, for they were looking at the long, sunlit course from a different point of view; but it had ceased to interest, for the lads were hungry and tired, glad enough too when the great stone landing-place was reached, and

after giving instructions to the men to take in the birds to place them in Mike's charge for transfer to Sree when he returned, they went into the palace, Harry to be Phra's guest over a very hearty, semi-English meal ; for the hunters had not returned and there was no temptation for Harry to go home and eat alone when he was warmly pressed to stay where he was, so as to be present when the hunters returned in triumph.

It was growing late by the time they had done, and they strolled out into the court, and then into the beautiful garden, one of the King's hobbies.

It was a lovely moonlight night, with here everything turned to silver, there all looking black and velvety in the shade. The river, too, looked its best, with the moonbeams playing upon its surface ; but the boys were growing too weary to admire the beauties around, or to heed the buzzing, croaking, and booming that came from across the river.

"Look here," said Harry at last, "they've gone farther than they meant, and they're not coming back to-night."

"Going to camp out ?" asked Phra dubiously.

"Not a doubt about it. Perhaps going to watch through the night for the tiger, with a goat or calf tied up for bait."

"Very likely," said Phra, yawning.

"There, don't turn sleepy like that."

"Can't help it."

"I say, look here ; go and tell your father you are coming down to the bungalow to keep me company to-night, because I don't like to be alone."

"No, you stop and sleep here. Then you will not have the bother of walking down there."

"No," said Harry firmly ; "father's out, and I'm sure he wouldn't like me to leave the house when he's away. Come and sleep at our place to-night, there's a good chap."

"Very well," said Phra. "Come with me and speak to father."

"All right," said Harry, coolly enough, and they walked through the moonlit garden together, when, as they passed toward the palace, the incongruity of it all seemed to strike the boy, and he laughed softly.

"I say, how comic it all seems ! Here's your father a great Eastern king—king over this big country, and yet he's only your father, and I'm going with you to talk to him just as if he was nobody at all."

"But he is," said Phra thoughtfully. "He's very different with other people, but he talks to you, and about you to me, just as if you were a—I mean a boy like I am."

"Well, it's very nice of him," said Harry. "I've never done anything to make him like me. I never went down on my knees and held my hands on each side of my face, and seemed as if I were going to rub the skin off my nose on the ground because he's a great king."

"No ; he laughed about it one day, and said that's why he liked you to be my playfellow."

"That's funny, isn't it ?"

"No ; he said he liked you because you were frank, and manly, and independent."

"Ah," said Harry, after a brief pause, "he doesn't know what a bad one I can be sometimes."

"Hist !"

"What for ?"

"Listen."

"I am listening, but I can't hear anything."

"I can, right away in the distance. Can't you hear ?"

"No, nothing but the frogs at the riverside, and the barking of a croc. Yes, I can ; something going thump, thump, far away."

"It's the drum. They're marching back with the elephants."

"Hurrah !" cried Harry excitedly. "Well, I am glad, because I should have lain awake ever so long thinking that something had happened, or that father was in danger from the tiger, perhaps. I say, you don't feel sleepy now ?"

"Sleepy ? No, not a bit. Here, let's get down yonder so as to meet them."

"But they'll be half an hour yet. Look there ; the guard has heard the drum."

As he spoke the picturesque beauty of the place was enhanced by the appearance of the guard turning out, bearing lighted torches, some of which were stuck at intervals about the courtyard, throwing up the grotesque figures and carvings abundantly scattered around.

Then more were fetched, and the place became brilliantly lighted for the reception of the King's friends who were bringing the body of the slain tiger in triumph home.

The red glare of the torches mingled strangely with the silvery light of the moon, so that some of the men's spears seemed to be tipped with silver, some with gold ; and listening and noting these things the time of waiting soon passed away for the boys, who at last joined a party of a dozen torch-bearers setting off to meet the returning party.

But before they reached the gate Phra stopped short and arrested his friend.

"No," he said in an earnest whisper, "don't let's go. Very likely my father will come out, and he would like us to be near to seem to be honouring and paying him respect."

"Very well," said Harry shortly ; for it was against his grain.

"Yes, there he comes," said Phra eagerly, as the palace entrance was lit up by numbers of lanthorn-bearers, and the King came and stood on the terrace to welcome his English friends.

At last the party of spearmen in advance marched in, with the elephants shuffling along side by side behind ; but each bore its load the same as when it started, no alteration having been made.

Harry ought to have let the elephants go close up to the terrace

and kneel before the King, to whom the result of the hunt should have been first communicated, but in his excitement he forgot all about Court etiquette, and ran up to the side of the nearest beast.

"Well, father, where's the tiger?" he cried.

"Over the hills and far away," cried the doctor.

"Yes, my boy," said Mr. Kenyon; "we have seen nothing but his pug—the marks of his feet."

CHAPTER IX NATURALISTS' TREASURES

THERE were a few words exchanged with the King as the hunters were about to descend, but he bade them keep their seats in the howdahs, saying that they must be very tired, and after ordering the mahouts to take their elephants to the gentlemen's quarters, he bade them good-night and went in.

"Then we must part here, Cameron," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Yes; good-night, and better luck next time."

The doctor's elephant rose and began to shuffle off, its companion following its example and uttering an angry trumpeting sound upon being checked.

"Here, Hal," said Mr. Kenyon, "you may as well ride."

"Yes, of course, father. Good-night, Phra." Then mischievously, "They'll have to send us if they want that tiger shot."

"Yes, Mr. Kenyon, we don't think much of you and Doctor Cameron as tiger-hunters."

The merchant laughed, as the elephant knelt once more and Harry scrambled up into the howdah, Sree, who was holding on behind, giving the boy a hand. Then there was a heave and a pitch to and fro, and the huge beast was on its legs again, shambling off towards the bungalow, a pleasant enough sight in the moonlight, and welcome enough to Harry, who was pretty well tired out.

"Didn't you see the tiger at all, father?" he asked.

"No, or most likely I should have shot it," replied Mr. Kenyon. "The brute has evidently gone off to the country on the slope of the mountains and saved his stripes this time. What have you been doing with yourself?"

Harry briefly told of his adventures.

"Then you have some decent specimens for me?"

"Yes, father; beauties."

"You have done better than we did, my boy. We have only brought back sore bones. There, I am not in much of a humour for talking to-night; I want a good rest."

"You must be tired, father."

"Yes, too tired to think of anything but sleep. Not quite, though; there are those birds. Sree, can you come first thing in the morning and skin them?"

"Yes, Sahib. I was going to ask if I might come."

No more was said till the elephant had stopped of its own accord at the gateway of the bungalow garden for as soon as it had got over its irritation at being separated from its companion it had gone steadily enough.

After this the mahout was so liberally rewarded that he wanted to get down from the elephant's neck to prostrate himself, and of course was not allowed, but sent back, Harry stopping to watch his great, grey, shambling mount till it disappeared, with Sree still hanging by the back of the howdah.

Breakfast was late the next morning, both the merchant and his son sleeping very soundly ; and when at last Harry dragged himself from his light bamboo bedstead and had refreshed himself, not with a good swim in the river,—a luxury too dangerous to attempt,—but by squatting in a large, open tub and pouring jars of cold water over his head, he went out into the verandah, to find Sree just finishing the skin of the last of the birds by painting the fleshy side all over with preserving paste before turning it back and filling it with cotton wool.

"How quick you have been, Sree !" said Harry. "I meant to have come and helped you."

"The young Sahib must have been tired."

"I'm tired now," said the boy, with a yawn. "But I say, they are all good birds, aren't they ?"

"Some of the best I have ever seen, Sahib ; there is hardly a feather gone. Look at this one," said the man, taking hold of the bird's long, thick beak and giving it a dexterous shake, with the result that the feathers fluffed up and then fell gently back into place, lying so lightly and naturally that it was hard to believe that nothing but the skull, leg and wing bones were left of the little creature which animated the skin so short a time before.

"Beautiful," said Harry, examining it and the others already prepared in turn. "I wish you had been with us, though. We had capital sport."

"Yes, Sahib, I wish I had been with you," said Sree. "My heart felt heavy for you when I found you were not to come. I like to be with the young Sahibs. We had no sport at all."

"Ah, you should have been with us. The crocodile must have been fourteen feet long."

"Ah ! but they would not be so big up the little river. I hope, though, the Sahib will not shoot any more."

"Not shoot any more !" cried Harry. "Are you friends with the wretches ?"

"No, Sahib," said the man solemnly ; "but they are dangerous beasts, and I fear if the young Sahib goes after them much there may be an accident."

"Hardly likely," said Harry contemptuously.

"I don't know, Sahib ; they are very dangerous beasts. A hungry mugger, as they call them over yonder on the Ganges, will

rush at any one in the water, or try to sweep him off the shore into the river. If he is wounded he is mad with rage, and strikes about furiously with his tail. One hard blow would break or overturn a sampan, and a man in the water is no match for one of these beasts."

"Oh, but I shall be careful, Sree," cried Harry; "and I can't help hating the monsters."

"We all hate them, Sahib, except some of the foolish people who would think it a sin to hurt a crocodile. Do not be rash."

"Oh no, I shan't be rash," said Harry; "but you should have been with us yesterday; it was rare fun with the little grey-whiskered monkey. It was frightened nearly to death, what with the noise of the gun and the fall plump into the water, and the ducking, and then being so nearly snapped up by the crocodile."

"It would be frightened, too, on finding it was a prisoner, Sahib."

"He looked just like a withered-up old man, not much bigger than a baby."

"Yes, Sahib; they are strange little beasts," said Sree, who was still busy with the skins, giving delicate touches here and there to the plumage, with a small needle made of ivory. "I never kill one if I can help it, because they are so much like very wild old men."

"That is a lovely skin, Sree," said Harry, bending over the blue and grey thrush.

"Yes, and these are hard to find, Sahib."

"Father will be delighted with those, I'm sure," said Harry. Then turning off to the old hunter's last remarks, "So you don't like shooting monkeys?"

"No, Sahib, I never do."

"It does seem a shame, for they're such merry, happy-looking little chaps, swinging and playing about in the trees. How they enjoy the fruit, too! They seem to have quite a jolly life."

"Oh no, Sahib; they have their troubles too," said Sree seriously, "and many of them."

"Monkeys do?" cried Harry, laughing. "Why, what troubles can they have?"

"Muggers waiting under the trees to catch any that fall, Sahib."

"Then they ought to know better than to play in the branches which overhang the river."

"That is where the best fruit grows, in the open sunshine, Sahib, and it is often when they go down to drink that the muggers catch them or sweep them into the water with their tails."

"Ugh! the beasts!" cried Harry.

"Then there are the leopards lying in wait up in the trees, and some of the big wild cats, too, staring at them. Monkeys are very quick, but the leopards are sometimes quicker."

"Yes, it's wonderful how active those spotted, cat-like creatures are. I say, Sree, have you ever seen one of the very big monkeys that live in the islands?"

"Only once, Sahib. It was when I went to Borneo with a Sahib from India. We were a long time hunting in the woods before we

found one, and then it was high up in a tree, going along hanging by his hands. He seemed to be a very quiet, tame sort of beast, only trying to get away ; but the Sahib shot him, and he hung from a great bough, oh, very high up, till the Sahib shot again, and then he let go and came down, dropping from bough to bough till he fell dead, nearly at our feet."

"Was it very big, Sree ? "

"Very, very big, Sahib ; nearly twice as big as I am."

"Really ? "

"Oh yes, Sahib. Not so tall as I am, not higher than the Prince Phra, but so big and broad—big head—big face with great swellings behind the cheeks—big shoulder, and big arms that reached down nearly to his feet. And such hands and feet, Sahib ! so big and strong."

"Much like a man, Sree ? "

"Like what a wild man might be, Sahib. And yet no, not like a man ; he was more like a wild beast, all hairy. The poor people here, some of them, believe that when we die, if we have been wicked we shall turn to monkeys or crocodiles."

"And do you believe that, Sree ? "

The man looked up and smiled, as he shook his head.

"Oh no, Sahib ; I don't believe anything of the kind. It is all nonsense ; but monkeys are very curious little things, and very cunning. They have plenty of sense."

"Think so ? "

"Oh yes. Did not you say that the one you caught was angry with the crocodile, and danced about and called him names ? "

"Well, he did something of the kind," said Harry, laughing ; "and very comical it was."

"Oh yes, Sahib, I've seen them spit at and shout and chatter at the muggers often enough. Being so much in the jungle, watching night and day, I often notice all that the wild things do—birds, snakes, lizards, as well as the tigers and bears and monkeys. I have seen how they fight, and how they play and teach their young ones to play ; but there is nothing which can play like a monkey. He is more full of fun than a boy. A monkey always seems to think that another monkey's tail is meant to pull, so as to tease him."

"Yes, I've seen them do that."

"But the funniest thing, Sahib," said the old hunter, "is to see a monkey pull another one's tail, and then pretend that he did not do it. I have seen one put his hand out behind, and give a pull, and then snatch his hand back and shut his eyes, pretending to be asleep."

"Oh, here you are," said Mr. Kenyon, coming into the verandah. "Come, Hal, breakfast ; we are very late."

"Here are the specimens Phra and I got yesterday father."

"These ? Capital ; excellent ! That is the kind of *Pitta* I wanted so badly, and those two kingfishers will be a splendid addition to the collection. Well skinned too, Sree. They are perfect."

Over the breakfast Mr. Kenyon related their adventures of the

previous day ; but there was nothing much to tell save of wearisome wanderings here and there through rugged, thorny ground where the tiger's pugs could be traced. Hollows were carefully beaten, and patches of reed and grass driven, while the hunters waited for the coming of the cunning beast which was not there. Then at last they found unmistakable traces of his having gone off, and, weary and disgusted, they had turned back.

Harry Kenyon and his father led a very pleasant life in that curious country, for their position was a favoured one, though a great deal was due to the latter's enterprise.

At first their existence was lonely, but it was not long before their position became a good deal talked about through correspondence which followed their arrival, and by degrees a happy little colony had grown up in the neighbourhood of the palace.

It was entirely at the King's invitation that Mr. Kenyon had first settled there, for being himself a man who took great interest in scientific matters and the wonders of nature, he had by accident come in contact with the merchant, who had sought an interview, with the object of asking certain concessions and leave to trade. The result was that Mr. Kenyon was taken quite by surprise on discovering that the King, whom he had expected to find much on a par with so many of the barbaric chieftains of the East, was a man who cared nothing for war and aggrandisement, neither for decking himself out in diamonds, emeralds, and pearls, but who was dressed in the simplest manner, loved to study chemistry, and surrounded himself with beautifully made microscopes and telescopes, obtained at great expense from London and Vienna.

That one interview was quite enough for the beginning of a friendship, the King soon finding out that his visitor was a man of similar tastes to himself, but immeasurably far in advance, and eager to impart his scientific knowledge to one to whom so many things were enclosed in what seemed to be a sealed-up book of wonder and mystery.

The consequence was that, instead of making a temporary stay in Siam, Mr. Kenyon gladly accepted the monarch's friendship and protection, settling down on the banks of the great river at once.

This had happened ten years before the events narrated here, but all had not been smooth. There had been plenty of the opposition of ignorance ; the King's far-seeing brain was almost alone, and his nobles and retainers of the blood royal looked with contempt upon the strange things that took up so much of their ruler's time. To them many of his studies seemed to be mere madness, and they looked at one another and shook their heads when they learned that the King spent the whole of some nights looking through a tube like a big bamboo, at the moon and stars.

Then worse things happened : it was found that he was doing uncanny things, a kind of magic by which he conjured up horrible creatures and made them dance and whirl about in water. He showed favoured people strange demons with teeth and horns and claws in a

dark room in the palace, where he made a great white spot of light come on the wall, into which he conjured the aforesaid monsters.

But the worst of all was his fitting up one little room with shelves and cabinets full of bottles and glasses. It was well known that here he studied, by mixing and boiling up, how to make horrible poisons, one drop of which shown to an enemy would produce madness, while if taken it was sudden death. And all this the nobles, priests from the great temples, and wise men generally, in secret conclave, came to the conclusion could only have one meaning, and that was to kill off secretly every one of the blood royal and second king's family, so that no one except the one the King wished could by any possibility succeed to the throne.

It was very dreadful, and they shook their heads more and more, and there were talks about its being a sacred duty to kill such a vile being, and make the second king the first ; but so far it had all been talk, for changes are a long time coming about among such people as these.

Then, too, for a long time Mr. Kenyon, this foreigner of the barbarians who came from the far West, was looked upon with sinister eyes, for was he not a favourite with the King, helping him to prepare his magic and his terrible poisons ?

But as no one died, and no one seemed to be any the worse for the King's magic, and above all as the great people of the country found that Mr. Kenyon was a very pleasant gentleman, who paid great respect to them and all their institutions, it was settled that he should not be stabbed with kries—unless he behaved worse or did some real harm.

He did offend soon after, for upon settling down he was favoured by the King with a grant of land on the banks of the river, this being looked upon as a great offence, land in such a position having heretofore been reserved for the sole benefit of the great nobles of the land and the priesthood, for their large monastic institutions—great walled-in enclosures of some fifteen or twenty acres, covered with the temples, shrines, and conventional dwelling-places of the talapoins or bonzes, as they were called, and easily enough to distinguish by their closely shaven heads and long, yellow robes. Ordinary people and the poor had to live, according to law, in house-boats, with which the rivers, canals, and backwaters were covered. These waterways were the highways—there were no proper roads—and were thronged with dwelling-places large and small, warehouses, shops, and places of entertainment, all built upon bamboo rafts and moored to the banks, forming a beautifully healthy, populous city, for the tide from the sea swept to and fro, clearing it from all impurities day and night.

That grant of land gave great offence, for who was this strange barbarian who had come among them with his little curly-haired boy and a servant, that he should be treated as if he were a noble lord of the land ? And once more Mr. Kenyon's position seemed to be precarious, for the King's favour went farther towards his

new English friend and student. For native workmen and material were supplied in abundance, the orders given to the men being that they should build the place, dwelling and warehouses, in accordance with Mr. Kenyon's design.

All this proved a great gain to both, for while Mr. Kenyon prospered wonderfully in his trading ventures, and had ample opportunity for collecting the strange products of the country in connection with his favourite study, the King found his revenues increase and his capital become more enlightened by the introduction of Europeans, who were attracted there through finding that they were protected, treated with respect, and encouraged to trade.

This was forgiven, and all went well till the doctor came, when the native medicos grew alarmed and threatening, for this Englishman, or Scotchman, knew better than they.

As the years went on the friendship grew firmer, and the King gladly seized the opportunity of letting his son share young Kenyon's studies, for his desire was that his boy should become an enlightened ruler, who would carry on his plans for the improvement of the country over which in all probability he would some day reign.

Mr. Kenyon, who was a highly cultivated man, gratefully entered into the King's plans and invited a clever university man from Oxford to come out and act as tutor to the two boys, with the result that the young Prince Phra passed a good half of his existence with Harry at the bungalow, sharing his studies and amusements, while Harry was always as welcome a guest as his father at the palace, having only to express a wish to have it gratified, whether his want took the form of books, fishing tackle, guns, men, elephants or boats for some expedition in jungle or open stream.

Harry's chum was a prince, and to all intents and purposes Harry led the life of a king's son himself, though he did not realize the fact, everything coming quite as a matter of course. His chief trouble had to do with the climate, which was, as he told Phra, "so jolly hot."

Phra replied sadly that he could not help it.

"No," said Harry thoughtfully, "you can't help it; but it's jolly hot all the same."

CHAPTER X WHAT HARRY HEARD

NO more was heard of the tiger, but the boys laughed and talked about it together, for they could not help enjoying the ill-luck which had attended those who went in its chase.

"I know how it is," said Harry, with mock seriousness; "the tiger heard who was coming to shoot him, and he went off to wait until Prince Phra had grown up old enough to go tiger-hunting in proper style."

"Yes, that's it," said Phra drily. "But you may as well say how you know. The tiger came and told you, I suppose."

"Oh, never mind that," said Harry. "I wish you wouldn't talk about it. I say, when's that chest coming from London?"

"Don't know; some day," said Phra.

It was pretty well on to half a year from the time of the order being given to the day when the big chest was delivered at the palace, being brought up by one of the royal barges, with its many rowers in scarlet jackets, from the vessel lying at the mouth of the river, right up to the stone landing-place in front of the palace, from which it was borne, attached to a couple of great bamboos, by a dozen men, preceded and followed by guards bearing spears.

"Such a jolly fuss," said Harry, frowning. "Why, you and I could have each taken hold of an end and carried it up to our house and opened it there."

"Well, no," said Phra; "you see, it is my father's, and he is King, and it is only proper for the box to be brought up like this."

"Is it?" said Harry contemptuously. "All right, only I thought the box was for us."

"So it is," said Phra; "but father has not given it to us yet."

"Oh, all right, only it does seem so stupid; and if a lot of English boys could see, I daresay they'd laugh like fun."

"If one of them laughed at my father he'd repent it," said Phra hotly.

"Tchah! They wouldn't laugh at your father. I should like to catch 'em at it! I should have something to say then."

Phra caught his friend warmly by the arm, and his eyes brightened.

"They might, though," said Harry solemnly, "if they saw him sitting under that big umbrella, with his silk padung on, looking like an old woman in a petticoat."

"That he doesn't," said Phra warmly; "and I'm sure a padung is a much more comfortable thing out here in a hot country than a pair of trousers."

"Oh, I don't know," said Harry; "but it is jolly hot."

"You don't know, because you have only put one on just for fun; but I often feel disposed to give up wearing trousers, and to go back to a padung again."

"What, go back to being a barbarian?" cried Harry. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well, I'm not," said Phra warmly. "It's much cooler, and more pleasant."

"Oh, you savage! You'd better say it's cooler to go without anything at all."

"So it is—in the shade," replied Phra.

"Well, I am!" cried Harry. "After all the trouble father, Dr. Cameron, and your most humble and obedient servant have taken to make a civilized being of you, to talk like that!"

"Civilized being! pooh! I should have been a civilized being without your help."

"Not you. To begin with, you wouldn't have worn trousers, and wearing trousers means everything. A man who wears

trousers stands at the very top of civilization. A man who doesn't wear them is a savage."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Phra. "I should like Mr. Cameron to hear you say that he was a savage."

"Who ever would say so? Mr. Cameron is—is—well, he's a tip-topper in everything."

"But he doesn't wear trousers when he goes with us shooting. He always wears his war petticoat then."

"Wears his what?" cried Harry wonderingly.

"That grey fighting petticoat. His kill it."

"Kill it? Kilt!" cried Harry. "Oh, what a rum chap you are sometimes, Phra! But that's only the old savage dress of the Highlanders. Hardly anybody but soldiers wears that now."

"Kill—kill it—kilt," said Phra thoughtfully. "What had you got to laugh at? Why, it does mean a war petticoat."

"All right; have it your own way," said Harry, who was watching the last of the guard following the box into the courtyard.

"But I don't want to have it my own way if I'm wrong," said Phra. "I want to be right."

"Very well. You are wrong there, lad."

"Why do they call it a kilt, then?" said Phra.

"Because it is a kilt, I suppose. Because—because—there, I don't know. We'll ask the doctor. But, I say, I didn't mean any harm about laughing at the King. I wouldn't, and I wouldn't let any one else laugh at him. He's such a good old chap; but he does look rum sometimes."

"Well, I know that," said Phra hurriedly. "And I don't like it, Hal, and I wish he would do as English gentlemen do; but he can't altogether."

"Why?"

"Because he's king, and the people wouldn't like it. The priests don't like a great deal that he does now, and they talk about it to the common people. They make them believe that my father is fighting against them and doing them harm."

"If I were your father, and they talked against me, I'd pitch them all into the river."

"No, you wouldn't, Hal. But hadn't we better go up to the door and see the chest opened?"

"Yes, come on," cried Harry eagerly, and they followed the guard, going by sentries armed with spear and kris, who smiled solemnly at the two boys, and made way for them with every show of respect.

They crossed the courtyard, which partook more of the nature of a garden, and looked particularly attractive, with its quaint, highly-pitched, gable-ended buildings around. But Harry had seen the place too often to pay any heed to the beautiful architecture, and he was all eyes for a little procession issuing from the principal doorway, consisting of the King, a quiet, grave-looking, grey-haired man, in silken jacket and sarong, and a number of his chief men, while the royal umbrella was held over his head.

The chest, one of ordinary deal, nailed down, strengthened with a couple of bands of hoop-iron, and directed in painted black letters, had been placed in front of the entrance, and ten spearmen stood in a row on each side, when the two boys, in obedience to a sign from the King, went up, each receiving a smile and a nod.

"Here is the new present," he said, smiling. "Take it, and see if everything is as you wished it to be; and I hope it will give you both much pleasure."

He spoke in very good English, and smilingly accepted the boys' thanks, before gravely turning and going back in procession to the main entrance to the palace; while, as soon as they were alone, Phra sent one of the guards to fetch a couple of artificers to bring hammers and chisels to open the chest.

"I don't believe a box ever had so much fuss made over it before," said Harry, laughing. "The things ought to be all right. I say, Phra, I hope nothing's broken."

"Oh, don't say that!"

"The big clock that came from England was. They're wretches, those sailors, for pitching packages about on board ship."

"They ought not to be allowed to be so rough," replied Phra. "My father would not permit them to be careless."

"Ah, but your father's one of the kings of Siam. We English people aren't allowed to slice people's heads off because they do as they like. I say, though, suppose they're burst."

"Burst! oh, I say, don't," cried Phra. "I've been looking forward to these things coming, so that we could play English games, and it would be horrible if we had to wait another six months."

"Perhaps they'll be all right," said Harry, in consolatory tones; "but that corner of the box has had a great bang, and the lid's split in two places, just as if it had been thrown down on the stones of a wharf."

"It says, 'With care. Keep this side up,'" said Phra.

"Oh yes; that's why they knock it about so, I suppose," replied Harry, laughing. "The sailors know their heads won't be chopped off."

"Here are the men," said Phra, as a couple of workmen came up, prostrated themselves, and then cleverly attacked the nails in the box, clumsy-looking as their tools were, removing the iron bands, wrenching up the lid and taking it off, while the guards and attendants stood stolidly looking on.

The removal of the lid revealed a quantity of paper shavings packed round sundry brown paper parcels, while one end of the chest was occupied by half a dozen pasteboard boxes, one of which was immediately opened, to reveal the neatly-sewn and laced leather cover of a football.

"What's that for?" said Phra. "Yes, I know; a football."

"Yes. You have first kick. I'll throw it down, and you run and kick it, just as you saw in our book of sports."

"I could not wish the guard looking on," said Phra.

"I could," said Harry. "English fellows can do anything. Here goes."

He threw the ball down heavily, making it rebound, and then as it repeated its rebounds he rushed at it, and, although he had never done such a thing before, gave it a flying kick which sent it high in the air, but only to come down and bounce into the fountain basin in the middle of the courtyard.

"Wonderful!" the spectators seemed to say, as they looked solemnly at one another.

"Oh, I didn't mean that," cried Harry, rushing after the ball, followed by his companion, who walked sedately up just as Harry had shouted to one of the guard to come.

"Here," he said in Siamese, "fish out that ball."

The man smiled, reached out over the basin, and in another moment would have transfixated the football on his keenly-pointed lance.

But Harry was too quick for him, and gave the lance shaft a thrust.

"Not like that," he cried; "you'd kill it—let all its wind out. This way."

He showed the man how to guide the ball to the side with his spear, and then picked it up all dripping, to place it in the sun to dry.

"I say, Phra," he said, as he paused to wipe his wet face; "I'm afraid football's going to be rather a hot game out here."

"The book said it was played in winter," said Phra.

"Yes, but then we haven't got any winter here, so we must play it any time we can. But it is going to be rather a warm sort of game. Never mind; we've got the balls—six of them."

"But you don't want six."

"Yes, you do," cried Harry. "Some will burst; some will get kicked over into some one else's place and lost perhaps. But I say, we must learn to play, as we have got the balls."

"Come and finish opening the box," said Phra.

"'Tis opened. Why don't you say unpacking?"

"Because I am not so full of English as you are," replied Phra, with a sigh; and they bent over the chest and went on taking out its treasures: bats, stumps, bails, pads and gloves, all carefully done up in brown paper, while a whole dozen of best cricket balls were in as many little boxes.

"Seem to be making a pretty good mess with all these shavings," said Harry, raising himself up with a sigh of relief that the box was at last emptied.

"The people shall clear all away soon," replied Phra, glancing at the stolid-looking guards, who were gazing wonderingly at the new form of war club with handle bound with black string, and at the short, sharp-pointed spears which seemed to be a clumsy kind of javelin. "But this cricket seems as if it would be a very hot game to play."

"Oh, I don't know," said Harry carelessly. "Of course I've never played, but I know all about it. If you come to that, so do you."

"Yes," said Phra thoughtfully, "but I'm afraid I shall not like a game where one has to get so many runs. It will be terribly hot work."

"But you only get a great many runs if you can."

"Then it will be much cooler and pleasanter if you can't get any," said Phra. "I say, Harry, couldn't we alter the game?"

"I don't know. I daresay we could."

"Let's do the batting ourselves, and make the people bowl and run after the balls."

"And always be in?" said Harry. "Well, that wouldn't be bad. But I say, where are we to play?"

"I should like it to be right away somewhere," said Phra. "It would not be pleasant for us to be running and tearing about with our people looking on and making remarks about our getting so hot."

"Never mind about the cricket to-day," said Harry. "You want a lot of fellows to play that—twenty besides ourselves; but we could have a game of football."

"Very well; let's play football, then. I'll have all these things taken into my room. Only let's get right away. I don't care about playing here."

"Why not? It will be a capital place if we take care not to kick the ball into the fountain."

"I don't like playing here, with all the men looking on. It seems so silly to be running after a ball and kicking it, as if you were cross with it for being on the ground."

"I never thought of that," said Harry. "But let's see: why do we kick it? I wish we'd been the same as other boys."

"Well, so we are, only you were born in India, and I was born here."

"I don't mean that," cried Harry. "I mean the same as other English boys are. They go to big schools where they learn all sorts of games when they're half as big as we are. But let's see; we want to know why everything is. Why do we kick the football?"

"To make it bounce, of course."

"That isn't all. We kick it to make it fly through the air."

"For exercise," said Phra.

"That's something to do with it, I suppose; but there's something else. It's to try who's best man. Don't you see?"

"No," said Phra; "I only know that we've got to learn to play football and cricket."

"Never mind about cricket now; let's get to play football first."

"But we don't know anything about it," said Phra, "and it seems so stupid. Let's ask Mr. Cameron to show us how."

"That we just won't," cried Harry. "He'd only laugh at us. 'What!' he'd say, 'don't know how to play football? Why, I thought every boy could play that.'"

"I don't like to be laughed at," said Phra.

"Of course you don't. I don't either. That's the worse of people too. Just because they know something that you don't know, they think themselves so awfully clever, and laugh at you because you don't know the same as they do."

"Well, how do we play? Do you know?"

"I know something about it. You make sides, because it's going to be a fight."

"Then it's a cowardly game," cried Phra.

"Why?" said Harry in astonishment.

"Because in a fight you ought to use your fists; you taught me so; and this is all kicking."

"Oh, what a chap you are, Phra! If I didn't know what a straightforward one you were, I should think you were making fun. Can't you see this is not a fighting fight, but a fight in fun —to see who's to get the best of it?"

"So's a fighting fight," said Phra.

"Yes, but this is play. There ought to be a lot of fellows on each side, but I don't see why two can't have a game. I'm sure they'll get more kicking. Now we're going to play; I'm against you, and you're against me."

"I see; I'm against you, and you're against me. Well?"

"We begin out in the middle of a place, with the ball between us. I've got to kick it to the hedge on your side, and you've got to prevent me. You've got to kick it to the hedge on my side, and I've got to prevent you. That's easy enough to understand, isn't it?"

"Oh yes, I understand that; but I shan't play here."

"Why?"

"Because we're sure to fall out over it and fight, and I don't want our guards to see me and you fighting."

"Oh, we shouldn't be so stupid."

"I don't know whether it's stupid, but I know how you are when you get hurt a bit, Hal. No, I shan't play here."

"Very well, come on home with me. There's plenty of room at the bottom of the garden, and there'll be no one to see us there except Mike, and I'll take care he is sent somewhere else."

"That will do," said Phra. "How many balls shall we want?"

"Only one, of course."

"Why not have two?" said Phra. "One apiece; then we shouldn't fall out."

"And we shouldn't be playing at football. This ball will do. Come on."

Phra made no further opposition, but he hazarded the remark that it was rather hot to play.

"Yes, this is the hottest place I was ever in," said Harry. "There couldn't be any place hotter. But come along; English boys don't study about its being hot or cold when they want to do anything. I'm glad Doctor Cameron is nowhere near. He'd be interfering and dictating about the game directly. That's the

worst of him, he knows so much. It will be much nicer for us to learn how to play well before he sees us at it, and then we shall know as much as he does."

The boys trudged off, with the sun shining down upon them as it can shine down in Siam. It was somewhere about a hundred degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, and it may readily be set down as being a hundred and twenty in the sun ; so that Harry was quite right in his remarks about Dr. Cameron, for if he had been present he most assuredly would have interfered to the extent of making them put the football away, and ordering them into the shade.

But there was no one to interfere, as they trudged on, and entered by the gate of the bungalow, finding all very quiet till they got around to the back, where a peculiar noise came through the open jalousies of one window, making Harry step forward on tip-toe till he could look in.

This done, he stepped cautiously back to his companion.

"Only Mike," he whispered. "Lying on his back fast asleep, and snoring like a young thunderstorm in the distance. Come along ; we shall have it all to ourselves."

"Where's your father ?"

"Gone down to the port in a boat, to see the captain of one of the ships."

Five minutes later they were in a good-sized field, well hedged in with native growth, and displaying a very respectable lawn-like greensward, one which had cost Mr. Kenyon years of trouble to get something like an English meadow.

It was a capital place, and having settled which were to be the goals—though Harry did not call them so—they walked into the middle of the enclosure to make a start.

"Now," said Harry, "of course we don't know exactly how to begin, but——"

"Why didn't we read what it said in the book ?" said Phra.

"What book ?"

"The one that came in the chest."

"I didn't see any book in the chest."

"I did : *The Book of Games* ; it was at the top, wrapped up in paper, and I sent it into my room so as to be safe."

"Well, you are a fellow !" cried Harry. "Never mind ; we'll read all through it to-night. Let's begin our way to-day. There lies the ball, and we must start fair. I'll say one—two—three, and away ! and then we must kick."

The boys stood face to face with the ball between them, and so close that their toes nearly touched it.

"Ready ?" said Harry.

"Yes."

"Then one—two—three—and away !"

Phra was quick as lightning almost, and at the word away ! he kicked at the ball ; but Harry, instead of kicking, thrust it a little

on one side so as to get a kick to himself, and he got it, right on the shin.

"Oh!" he cried, beginning to hop on one leg, while Phra sent the ball flying towards his goal, and ran after it at full speed.

"Hi! stop! stop! stop!" shouted Harry.

But Phra was too much excited to halt. He was finding a certain amount of satisfaction in delivering kick after kick to the yielding ball, which, in spite of a long voyage, proved to be wonderfully elastic, and flew here, there, and everywhere, except in the direction of the goal. For Phra's kicks were wanting in experience. He kicked too high, or too low, or out of centre; and the consequence was that he had a great deal of exercise, before a final kick sent the ball up to the hedge which formed one goal.

He turned round now, streaming with perspiration and flushed with triumph, to find that Harry had been limping and panting after him, to come up now, hot and angry.

"I've won," cried Phra. "What a capital game!"

"You've won!" grumbled Harry. "Of course you have. Any one could win who didn't play fair. But it wasn't playing."

"Why, what's the matter?" said Phra, staring.

"You know; you kicked me instead of the ball, and crippled me so that I couldn't try."

"I'm so sorry, Hal. Ought you to have been kicking too?"

"Yes, and I wish I had—I wish I had kicked you at the beginning as you did me."

"But that was an accident," said Phra earnestly.

"It hurt just as much as if you had done it on purpose."

"Never mind," cried Phra; "let's begin again. I didn't understand the game. But, I say; it's splendid fun."

"Oh, is it?" said Hal, sitting down to rub his tender shin.

"Yes, splendid. When you kick the ball it flies off so beautifully. You seem obliged to run after it."

"Yes," said Harry sarcastically, "and then I was obliged to run after you. Why didn't you kick it my way?" he added fiercely.

"I couldn't," replied Phra innocently. "That's the funny part of it, and I suppose the ball's made so on purpose. It never went the way I kicked it, but flew to all sorts of places. But I say, it's glorious fun running after it for the next kick."

"Oh, is it?" sneered Harry; for if the skin was not off his shin, it certainly seemed to be off his temper.

"Yes, come on, and let's begin again."

"Shan't," said Harry sourly; "it's too hot."

"Oh, nonsense; you don't feel it when you're at play."

"Play! I don't call it play," cried Harry angrily. "I call it being a pig and trying to have everything to yourself."

"Oh, I say, don't talk like that, Hal! I didn't know I was doing wrong. There, I apologise. I won't do it again. Come along."

"No, I'm not going to try now. It's a fool of a game, and all one-sided."

"Well, never mind ; you'll have the right side sometimes. Let's start off again. I know you'll like it."

"No, I'm not going to play any more," grumbled Harry. "I wish the old ball was burst."

"You are in a temper," said Phra quietly. "I'm sorry I hurt you. Here, have a kick, Hal."

"Shan't ; I'm too hot and tired."

"Rest a bit, then," said Phra. "I say, what queer people the English are to have invented a game like that ! They must look so comic."

"What !" cried Harry indignantly. "Well, I do like that ! Who looks comic, playing at shuttlecock and kicking it up in the air, and sending it back with the knees, elbows, or shoulders ? I've seen some of the men knock the great shuttlecock up with their necks or chins. Now, that does look stupid."

Phra's eyelids contracted a little, and there was a frown upon his brow for a few moments.

It passed off then, and he brightened up, just when a few angry words would have caused an open rupture.

"Come and have a try, Hal, old chap," he said. "Sorry I hurt you," and he held out his hand.

This was too much for Harry, whose irritation was passing off with the pain. Jumping up quickly, he made a snatch at the ball, sent it flying, dashed after it, and delivered a tremendous kick, intending to send it right across the field.

But it did nothing of the kind, for the kick proved to be a regular sky-flyer, the ball taking an almost perpendicular course. Harry was lying in wait for it as it came down, ready to kick again ; but Phra was coming, and unintentionally proved that two legs are much better for stability than one.

Of course every one knows this, and takes it for granted, just as most of us know some of the problems of Euclid, and could take the theory there set out for granted. But the old Greek philosopher proves them all, and Phra proved our theory by giving Harry a sharp push just as one leg was raised, sending him over like a single ninepin, and securing the ball once more, racing away, laughing heartily the while.

"Oh !" ejaculated Harry ; "and him only a nigger ! He shan't beat me like this."

He rushed off, with his temper coming back, in full chase of Phra, who ran on, kicking the ball, and roaring with laughter the while, till just as he was about to finish off with a tremendous kick, one which would secure a goal if it went straight, Harry came on with a rush, sent him flying instead of the ball, turned, and enjoyed a capital series of kicks before he was overtaken in turn.

Phra tried to put the same tactics into force, bounding right at Harry, who was just on the point of kicking home, when a thrust sent him over, and while still under the impetus of his run, Phra delivered the kick instead, a kick which proved to be the most

direct that had been given, for the ball landed close to Harry's hedge, bounced, and went right home.

"There," cried Phra, flushed with victory ; "I've won again."

Then he stared, for Harry threw himself down, panting and roaring with laughter.

"What are you laughing at ?" cried his adversary. "That makes two games I've won."

"No," cried Harry, wiping his eyes ; "this one's mine.

"Nonsense ! I kicked the ball."

"Yes, but into my goal."

"No ; it's mine. I kicked the ball there."

"By mistake ; for me."

"Oh, what a stupid game !" cried Phra pettishly. "Phew ! how hot I am ! I don't want to play any more at a game like that."

And now, with the excitement at an end, both found that playing football in their fashion under such a sun was an exercise of which a very little went a long way.

They stretched themselves out on the ground, with the ball lying hard by getting warm.

"Oh, I say, it's too hot to stop here ; come and lie in the shade," cried Harry. "Let's go indoors."

They went back, passed through the verandah, and entered the dining-room.

It was as hot there, a heavy, stagnant heat ; but there was a basket of oranges upon the table.

"These'll be better than water to drink," said Harry, rolling four across the table to his companion, and pocketing as many for his own use.

"But we can't stop here," said Phra ; "it's too hot to breathe."

"I know ; let's go and lie down on the floor at the landing-place."

"Yes, that will do," replied Phra, and a few minutes later the boys were extended upon their backs upon the bamboos, shaded by the palm-leaf roofing, and feeling a faint breath of warm air come up from the surface of the river, just as if it had floated up from the sea.

Here, as they lay, the boys peeled their oranges and threw the yellow rind into the river, where, whenever the white side fell downward, there was a loud splash made by a fish, which dashed at it and left it again as not good enough for food.

The oranges were not good—they were small and pithy, as if the sun had dried all the juice out of them ; but they were the best the boys could obtain, and they were eaten in silence, neither feeling disposed to talk ; and then the natural thing occurred to two boys hot and tired upon a torrid day when there was a sleepy hum in the air in and out beneath the shade in which they lay.

Five minutes after the last orange was eaten, a heavy breathing could be heard.

"Asleep, Phra?" said Harry softly.

A repetition of the breathing was the reply, and Harry lay with his hands clasped under the back of his head, gazing up at the palm thatch, where all looked softly light, though it was in the shade, the reason being that the sunshine was reflected from the surface of the water and played in a peculiar, mazy way upon the inner part of the roof, as if a golden net were covering the palm leaves and being kept in continuous motion.

There was a good deal to be seen up there: flies were darting about, and often faring badly, for every now and then a lizard ran along, looking like a miniature crocodile, the sunny reflections in full motion resembling the water.

The dart of one of these lizards upon an unfortunate fly was too quick for the eye to follow. One minute the curious little creature in its glistening armour would be creeping up to within a few inches of a fly busy at work brushing its head and wings with a care and nicety that suggested great pride in its personal appearance; the next moment there would be what seemed to be a faint streak upon the palm thatch, and the lizard would be where the fly was preening itself, but the fly was gone, and it had not been seen to fly away. It was there still, but securely enclosed, and ready to be transmuted into food.

"They are quick," thought Harry; but his attention was taken off the lizards to the action of something gliding along among the loose leaves of the thatch—something long and pale green and grey. It seemed to be so insecurely placed that it appeared to be on the point of falling, and if it had dropped it must have been upon the sleeping figure of Phra. But somehow it held on by means of the long plates or scales at the lower part of its body in one or two places, while the rest hung in limp, unsupported folds.

It was very interesting to follow the sinuous movements of this snake, a gracefully thin creature of about four feet long; and over and over again Harry laughed to himself, thinking how Phra would jump when he felt the thin, twining reptile drop upon him; but there was no fear of its falling, for it had the instinct of self-preservation strong within its fragile body, and it always appeared to be holding on tightly by one part, while the other was gliding forward seeking a fresh hold.

It was nothing new to the watcher, for Harry had seen snakes of this kind often, both living and dead, and his father had pointed out to him that it was of a perfectly harmless description, the head being softly elliptical and gently graduated off in its junction with the long, thin neck, showing no sudden swellings out caused by the possession of poison glands, which give to the dangerous little serpents the peculiar spade-shaped or triangular head with the corners bluntly rounded off.

As Harry lay watching the snake, he fully expected to see it dart its head at some of the flies buzzing about, but it went on its way

quietly investigating, for it was in search of more juicy morsels than flies, its instinct having taught it that the palm thatch of such a roof as that in which it searched was exceedingly likely to contain the nest of some mouse or hole-loving bird, one of the little wren-like creatures whose fat, featherless young would form delicious morsels for a creature whose teeth were implements for holding on and not for masticating its prey.

In those days the American humourist was not born, or, as he did, Harry might have lain there and wondered in connection with their food and the great length of neck whether it tasted "good all the way down." But naturally, as he had not read the lines, he thought nothing of the kind. In fact, he paid no more heed to the little snake beyond thinking of what a number of different things there were living in that thatched edifice ; for all at once there was a low, deep, humming buzz, a flash as of burnished copper, and a thick, squat beetle flew in beneath the roof, lit on one of the bamboo rafters, and began to fold up its gauzy wings perfectly neatly, shutting them up beneath their cases, into which they fitted so closely, that when all was shut up there was no sign of opening, and a casual observer would never have imagined that such a short, stumpy, armour-clad, horny creature, all spikes and corners about the legs, could fly.

That beetle took up a great deal of Harry's attention, for all was so still that when it crawled up into the thatching, holding on by its hooked legs, the rustle and scratching could be plainly heard. But at last the sound seemed to be distant, while, strangely enough, the beetle gradually appeared as if it were swelling out to a gigantic size, but grew hazy and undefined, and was apparently about to die out as if into mist, when Harry started and saw that it was just the rounded, stumpy, coppery green insect again, and he knew that he had been asleep and was startled into wakefulness by some sound close at hand.

Voices, and then the rippling of water, and as he lay perfectly still upon his back he knew that a boat was coming abreast of the landing-place and a man was talking in a haughty, contemptuous way, as if in answer to some question that had been asked.

"That Feringhee dog the King favours ; he was the beginning of the swarm that invaded the country."

"Never mind," said another voice ; "don't be angry : it will soon come to an end."

"The sooner the better. I am sick of all this. A mad king makes mad people who will not sit still and see their country ruined by his follies. What whim will he have next ? "

"Who knows ? There is always some case or another coming by one of the unbelievers' ships. I believe they send their diseases and sicknesses here to kill our people, so that they may come and take the country. It is all wrong. What a beautiful place that man has here ! "

"Hist ! don't talk."

"Why not? I do not mind who hears. I would say what I do even before our foolish king."

"Be silent; there are people lying asleep on that landing-place, and they might hear."

One of them did hear—plainly enough, for in still weather water has a wonderful power for conveying sounds along its surface. These words were spoken in the native dialect, but every word was clear to the involuntary listener, for the language was almost as familiar to Harry as his own.

The words jarred upon him. What did they mean? The speakers from their tone were evidently people who hated the English colonists, and an intense desire to see whether they were people whom he knew animated the boy with the disposition to start up and look. But on second thoughts he felt that it might be better for them if they appeared to be asleep, especially as Phra was the King's son.

But once more the desire to see who it was grew strong in Harry's breast, and as the light splashing of the oars grew less plain he slowly turned his head till he could open one eye and gaze over the surface of the river.

He was too late; there was nothing in sight but the boats moored to the farther bank.

"I could see them from the far end of the garden, though," he thought; and rolling himself gently over three or four times, so as not to awaken Phra, he reached the bridge-like way off the stage into the garden, where he rose to his feet and keeping in shelter of the flowering shrubs which had been abundantly planted, he made for the corner of the garden higher up the stream, for the slow progress of the boat in passing showed that the people, whoever they were, had gone in that direction.

Harry had little difficulty in getting to the boundary of his father's grounds, keeping well under cover, though it was hot work hurrying along in a stooping position. But when he raised his head cautiously and peered over the river, the result was disappointing.

There was the boat certainly, going on against tide, propelled by a couple of stout rowers; and it was evidently the boat of some one well to do, for the rowers were dressed alike. As to the occupants of the central part beneath the awning, they were partly hidden by the uprights which supported the light roof shelter, and their backs were towards him. They were richly dressed, but though the boy watched till the boat passed out of sight beyond a curve they did not turn their heads once.

Harry returned to the landing-stage, feeling troubled and thoughtful. He was asking himself whether he should tell Phra what he had heard, and a feeling of shrinking from making his companion uncomfortable had almost fixed him in his determination to say nothing until he had told his father.

But Phra's action altered all this.

For just as he was about to set foot upon the stage, Phra leaped up and began to rub his ear frantically.

"What did you do that for?" he cried fiercely.

"Do what?" said Harry, laughing at the boy's antics.

"You put that nasty little beetle in my ear."

"I didn't," cried Harry, bursting into a roar of laughter.

"Yes, you did. There it is," cried Phra angrily, as he stamped upon and crushed a little round insect about the size of the smaller lady-bird. "Tickle, tickle, tickle! Why, if I hadn't woke up, the horrible little creature might have eaten its way into my brains, and killed me."

"Nonsense! nothing would do that."

"Well, you had no business to play such silly boys' tricks. It's enough to make me hit you. Yes, you can laugh at me; but if I were regularly angry, you would be ready to run."

"Run away?" said Harry merrily.

"Yes, run away."

"Oh yes, and never come back again. You frighten me horribly."

"You're mocking at me, but I tell you it was very cowardly and stupid."

"No, it was not; for I did not do it, my boy."

"What? why, I woke up and caught you just as you were going to run away."

"No, I was coming back."

"Oh, Hal! that's what you call a cracker, and that's more cowardly still. When I went to sleep you were lying down beside me, and when I woke up you were standing over there."

"That's right," said Harry.

"And when you woke up you felt mischievous, and caught that little beetle to put in my ear."

"That's wrong," said Harry sturdily.

"Why, I felt it directly it was in; and you must have done it."

"Oh, of course, because beetles have no legs to crawl, and no wings to fly, and you weren't lying ear upward so that it could drop in off the roof."

"You may argue as long as you like, and as I was asleep, of course I couldn't quite tell how you did it; but there's the beetle. See?"

"Oh yes, I can see," said Harry thoughtfully; "but I didn't put it there. It got into your ear while I was away."

"Oh, Hal!"

"And oh, Phra!"

"To say you were coming back when you were just going to slip away!"

"Wasn't going to slip away. I tell you I was coming back."

"I don't believe you."

"Very well," said Harry; "don't."

"I—I mean, I beg your pardon, Hal."

There was no reply.

"Tell me why you went away," said Phra, who felt that he had gone too far.

"It's of no use. You will not believe me," said Harry, taking out his knife and beginning to carve his initials on one of the big bamboos.

"Yes, I will!" cried Phra. "I daresay I was wrong. I was cross with being woke up like that, and I felt sure you had done it."

"And you feel sure now," said Harry coldly.

"No, not sure," said Phra frankly, "only doubtful."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself for feeling so. It's not as if I were a Siamese fellow—they say anything. An English boy doesn't like to be doubted."

"Beg your pardon, Hal—so sorry," said Phra penitently. "Shake hands."

"Not I," said Harry stiffly. "I'm not going to shake hands with a chap who doesn't believe my word."

"Hal!" cried Phra, with a pleading look in his eyes.

"We'd better not be friends any more; and you'd better go away and have nothing more to do with us English people."

"Why? What makes you say that?"

Harry was silent, and stood frowning there, hacking at the bamboo; but the quick-witted Siamese lad seemed to grasp the idea that there was something more behind the fit of annoyance, and began to press his companion. And the more silent and mysterious Harry proved to be, the more he pressed.

For a time he obtained nothing but mysterious hints and bitter words about things not being as they should be, and at last the boy said angrily,—

"Look here, Hal, I'm sure you are hiding something. I woke up and saw you there, and I felt sure you had been playing some trick. You know you often do."

"Yes, often," said Harry quietly.

"Then you told me you had not, and I begged your pardon for saying things when I was cross. I know you well enough now; you can't keep up anything of that sort—you get in a temper sometimes, but it's all over soon and you shake hands, or even if you don't, it's soon all right again and forgotten; but now you keep on talking about our not being friends any more, and I'm sure there's something the matter. Now, isn't there?"

Harry nodded and looked gloomy as he went on cutting in the hard wood, and spoiled the shape of the K he was carving.

"What is it, then? Why don't you tell me?"

"Don't want to make you uncomfortable."

"Then it's something serious?"

Harry nodded again.

"You're not going away, Hal?" cried Phra excitedly.

"It seems as if we'd better," said Harry gloomily.

"No, that you shan't!" cried Phra angrily. "Who says that? I know; it's your father's offended about something. But I won't have it."

Harry smiled.

"You're not king," he said.

"No, but I shall be some day, and till I am, my father will let me have anything I like, so long as it's wise and good. It's quite right for you and your father to stay here, for it's doing you both good, and us too. Father said only the other night that it was a grand thing for the country to have wise Englishmen here to instruct us in everything."

"Do you think so, Phra?"

"Of course I do. Why, look at last year, when that dreadful plague came and the people were dying so fast till Doctor Cameron made them keep the sick people to themselves, and had their clothes and things burnt. Father always says he stopped it from going any further. It's so with everything, if people would only learn."

"But they don't like us," said Harry.

"The sensible ones do. It's only the silly, obstinate, old-fashioned folk who like to go on always in the same way, and who think that they know everything and that there's nothing more to be learnt. Here's something you never heard. Some of the other king's people put it about last year that father was making poisons in his room so as to kill the people."

"Oh yes, I know it," said Harry bitterly.

"And they say the bad diseases come in the cases father has from England. I daresay they'll think that there's another plague come in our case with the cricket bats and balls."

"They do say so," said Harry.

"How do you know?" cried Phra sharply.

"Heard 'em."

"When?"

"Just now, when you were asleep."

"Hah! Then that's it!" cried Phra; and it all came out.

The Siamese lad heard his companion to the end with a look of haughty contempt which made him look years older, and when he had finished he said slowly,—

"Poor silly idiots! Those are the sort of people who would say that a blowpipe was better than a rifle. What does it matter?"

"Matter? Why, it is bad for you and your father to be friendly with such people as we are."

"How absurd!" cried Phra. "The weak, silly, ignorant people are so stupid about things they do not understand."

"But these were not common, ignorant people, but noblemen."

"Very likely," said Phra, with a shrug of his shoulders. "It is as father says: many of the old noblemen of the other king's party are too proud to learn anything, and they pretend to believe he deals in magic and is mad."

"Yes, that's how they talked," said Harry.

"Well, let them talk. I'm glad my father is so mad as he is, and wants to learn all about the wonders of the world, and to get me to learn them too. And I do like it, Hal ; I'm ever so fond of learning about all these strange things. Of course I like playing games, too, and even your games that you teach us are wonderful and clever. Pooh ! let the silly people talk till they learn to know better."

"But these men in the boat spoke threateningly of it all having an end, just as if they meant to attack the King and drive us all away."

"Bah !" ejaculated the lad. "Attack my father ? Pooh ! they dare not. He's as gentle and kind as any one can be, but he can be angry too, and when he is, he is very fierce and stern. He won't believe that any one would dare to attack him. I don't believe it either."

"But if you had heard those two men talk ? "

"Well, then I should have heard two men talk, that's all. What is talking ? A mere nothing."

"But suppose they were to begin to act ? " said Harry, who was looking at his friend admiringly.

"What do you mean—fight ? "

"Yes."

"I hope they will not," said Phra rather sadly, "because it would be so terrible. They would fight because they don't know better, and they will not learn. But they would learn then when it was too late."

"What would happen ? "

"A number of foolish people would be killed, and when those who began the trouble were caught——"

"Yes ? " said Harry, for Phra had ceased speaking ; "what would happen then ? "

"They would have to die, too, and it seems horrible when the great world is so beautiful and people might be happy."

"Think the King would have them executed ? "

"Of course. He is all that is good and kind to everybody now, but if the people rose against him, he would say, 'Poor blind, foolish creatures ! I must forgive them, for they don't know better ; but the leaders must suffer for leading them into sin.' "

"And their heads would be chopped off ? "

"Certainly," said Phra coldly. "It would be for every one's good. But don't look like that, Hal ; we can't help the stupid people talking foolishly. It does not matter to us."

"But it does," said Harry. "It makes me think that we ought not to stay."

"Nonsense ! " cried Phra.

"Are you going to tell your father what the people are saying ? "

"No ; why should I ? "

"I think he ought to know," said Harry.

"I daresay he does know how people talk, but it does not trouble him. They are foolish people who do not know he is the best king we have ever had. Let them talk. There, I am going home now. You keep the football."

CHAPTER XI

THE NAGA'S BITE

PHRA had not been gone long before Mr. Kenyon returned from his business down in the port, and in reply to his question, "Anything fresh happened, my boy?" Harry told him what he had heard, watching his father's face intently the while.

"Then you think it is very serious, father?" said Harry.

"Do I, Hal? What makes you say that?"

"You look anxious about it."

"I was not aware that you were studying my face," said Mr. Kenyon, smiling. "Well, it is serious news, and it is not serious, if you can understand that. The words you heard were those of dissatisfied folk, and these exist everywhere. Of course I have long known that the common, ignorant people resent our being here a good deal, especially the followers of the second king, as they call him; but most of the people like us, and I find that they are very eager to deal with me in business, trusting me largely with their goods, and quite content to wait till I choose to pay them. That looks as if we have a good character. Then, as regards our treatment in the place, you have never found any one insulting or offensive to you."

"No, father; every one is smiling and pleasant."

"Of course. You need not trouble yourself about the disagreeable remarks of a couple of malcontents."

These words cheered Harry, whose young imagination had been piling up horrors to come for the dwellers at the palace and the English people who were near.

Two days later, when he was a little higher up the river, a pleasant, musical voice saluted him from the other side of a hedge.

"What! going by without calling? For shame!"

Harry turned through a gate and down a path to where a lady was seated busy over some kind of needlework under a shady tree.

There was something so pleasant in her smile of welcome that the boy eagerly caught at her extended hand, before taking the chair that was pointed out.

"But that's the doctor's," he said.

"Yes, but he is down the river in his boat, seeing some of his patients. Have some fruit, Harry. All that basketful was sent us this morning by one of Duncan's patients."

"How nice! May I take that mangosteen?"

"Take all," said Mrs. Cameron, for she it was. "The people are never tired of sending us great pines and melons. They are

so nice and grateful for everything my husband does for them. I used to think it would be very dreadful to come out here amongst all the strange, half-savage people, as I expected they would be."

"But they are not savage," said Harry.

"Savage? No. They are as gentle and nice as can be. They seem to be more afraid of us than we are of them."

Harry feasted his eyes upon the sweet face and form of the graceful English lady, and the sight seemed to bring up something misty and undefined of some one who used to lean over his little bed at night to press her warm lips upon his face, which was brushed by her long, fair hair.

It was a pleasant feeling, but sad as well, for the few moments that the memory stayed.

Then he had to answer questions as to why he had not brought his friend with him, of the games he had been playing, about his excursions; and he was in the midst of his answers when a quick step was heard, and Mrs. Cameron sprang up.

"Here is Duncan," she cried.

"Hullo, Hal!" cried the doctor, entering; "here you are, then! Where's the Prince?"

"He has not been down to-day."

"Oh, then that is why we are honoured with a visit, is it?"

"I—I was not coming to see you to-day, was I, Mrs. Cameron?" said Harry, colouring.

"No, that is a fact," said the lady. "He was going right by, but I called him in."

"Ah, well, we will forgive you. Stop and have tea with us."

Harry's acceptance showed that he was only too glad, and after the pleasant meal in the verandah, there was an interesting hour to be spent in the doctor's curious compound of surgery, study, and museum, where plenty of fresh insects had to be examined.

Mrs. Cameron displaying a bright, girl-like interest in everything, till called away to give some instructions to her servants.

"How Mrs. Cameron must help you, Doctor!" said Harry. "I did not know that she was so clever at pinning out moths."

"Look here," said the doctor sternly, "have you been saying anything to her about what you told your father you heard said in that boat?"

"Not a word, sir."

"That's right. I'm glad of it; but I was afraid."

"Oh, I shouldn't have thought of telling her."

"I'm glad you have so much discretion, my boy. You see, ladies are easily made nervous; and if my wife had heard all that, she would have been fidgeting about it every time I was away, and of course that is very often."

"You don't think there is any danger, do you?"

"Not the slightest, my boy; the people are all too friendly. It is only a few discontented humbugs who are old-fashioned and object to the King's ways."

"That is what my father says," said Harry.

"And that is what I say, so let's think no more about it."

"There's Phra," cried Harry, starting up, as a long-drawn whistle was heard.

Harry ran out, and was going down to the gate, passing Mrs. Cameron, who was walking back to her seat under the tree; but all of a sudden she stopped short, tottered as if about to fall, and then stood there with a ghastly face as white as her dress.

It was a mere glimpse that the boy obtained, but it was enough to check his hurried race for the gate.

Something was wrong, he could not tell what; but the doctor's wife was evidently in sore trouble, and he turned to go to her help.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Cameron?" he cried; but she made no reply. It was as if she had not heard him speak, and with head averted she stood looking to the left in a singularly strained attitude, like one striving to escape from something horrible, but whose feet were held to the ground.

In his excitement Harry ran round before her and caught her hand in his, to find it icily cold; but she only uttered a gasping sound, and still stared horribly and with convulsed face down to her left.

Very few moments had elapsed from the boy's first taking alarm till he now turned wonderingly to his right to follow the direction of Mrs. Cameron's eyes, and then a horrible chill ran through him, and he felt paralysed and helpless, for there, not six feet away, raised up on the lower part of its body, was one of the most deadly serpents in the world, its grey brown marked scales glistening as it played about in a wavy, undulatory fashion, its so-called hood spread out showing the spectacle-like markings, and its flattened head turned down at right angles to the neck, with the forked tongue playing and flickering in and out through the little opening in its jaws.

The lower part of the creature was partly hidden by the flowers on a dry bed, but the anterior portion rose fully three feet above the plants, and the creature swung itself about and rose and sank as if preparing for a spring upon the fascinated woman; for either from horror or some occult power on the part of the deadly reptile, Mrs. Cameron was perfectly helpless, and promised to be an easy victim to the cobra when it struck.

But Harry's stunned sensation of horror did not last; he stepped back for a moment or two, looking sharply about for a weapon, but looked in vain, for there was nothing near but a small bamboo stool.

It was better than nothing. He caught it up by one leg, and raising it above his shoulder he stepped quickly between Mrs. Cameron and her enemy, prepared to strike with all his might, while the cobra's eyes seemed to burn, and it drew back as if about to spring.

At that moment, released from the influence of the reptile by the interposition of Harry's body, the power of movement returned,

and uttering a low, sobbing cry Mrs. Cameron sank slowly to her knees upon the ground, where she crouched, watching the movements of her champion, but not daring to look again at the serpent.

The sobbing cry behind him drew Harry's attention from his enemy for a moment, but only for that space of time. Then he was once more on guard, fully realizing the danger of his position, but so strung up by the emergency that he felt not the slightest fear.

Harry's was but a momentary glance back, but it was an opportunity for the enemy.

Quick as lightning it struck. There was the darting forward as of a spring set free, the stroke and the rebound, and as the reptile was about to strike again Harry delivered his blow, which crushed down the hissing creature with such effect that the next moment it had writhed itself out from among the plants, to lie clear to receive blow after blow from the stool, till the latter flew into fragments, while the cobra twined and twisted and tied itself into knots in its agony, close to the lad's feet.

He did not attempt to shrink away, only looked round for something else to seize as a weapon, and then he stared strangely at Mrs. Cameron, who had sprung up.

"Harry! What is it?" she cried hoarsely. "Did it bite you?"

"Don't know," he said, in a curious, husky voice. "I—I think so; but I've killed it."

"But where? show me where?" panted Mrs. Cameron wildly.

For answer Harry drew back the cuff from his right wrist, and held it up.

"There," he said.

Without a moment's hesitation Mrs. Cameron caught the lad's hand and arm and raised it to her lips, sucking the tiny puncture with all her power, and then, as she withdrew her lips for a moment, she shrieked out,—

"Duncan! Duncan! help, help!" before placing her lips to the bite again.

"What's the matter?" cried Phra, running to them from the gate. "Mrs. Cameron! Hal! What is it?"

"Snake," said Harry faintly, just as Phra caught sight of the writhing creature, struck at it, and watching his opportunity crushed its head into the ground with his heel, the reptile in its dying agonies twining tightly about his ankle and leg.

Mrs. Cameron took her lips from the wound again, and her lips parted to shriek once more; but her cries had been heard, and the doctor came running down to her side.

There was no need to ask questions—he saw what had happened at a glance, and the dangerous nature of the wound was told by the swollen shape of the snake's neck by Phra's boot.

"Once more," he said to his wife; "then let me."

As Mrs. Cameron pressed her lips to the wound, her husband snatched the thin silk neckerchief Harry wore from his neck, twisted

it up into a cord, and tied it as tightly as he could round the lad's arm, just above the elbow-joint.

"Now let me come," he said sharply. "Run in, Mary; fetch basin, sponge, water, and the caustic bottle."

Mrs. Cameron was used to her husband's ways in emergencies, and resigning the patient to his hands she ran off to the house.

"Sit down here, Hal," said Cameron, "and keep a good heart, lad. I daresay we shall take it in time."

As he spoke he pressed the silent lad back into Mrs. Cameron's chair, snatched off the jacket, tore open the shirt-sleeve, and then drew out his pocket-book, from which he took a lancet.

With this he scarified the tiny wound, making it bleed freely, before placing his lips to it and trying to draw the poison away again and again, while Phra stood close by, his face of a livid hue, and making no offer of help on account of his position.

For the serpent was still twined tightly about his ankle and leg, and he felt sure that if he released the head from beneath his foot, the reptile would strike again.

By this time Mrs. Cameron was back with the various articles required, and she knelt down with the basin in her lap as the doctor took a little wide-mouthed bottle from her hand, removed the stopper, shook out a tiny stick of white, sugar-looking crystal, and after moistening the end, liberally used it in and about the mouth of the wound.

"Hurt you, my boy?" said Cameron sharply, as Harry lay back, with his eyes tightly closed.

"Horribly," was the reply. "Feels like red-hot iron."

"Do you good, boy. Act like a stimulus. Now, can you walk indoors?"

"I think so."

"One moment. You, Phra, run up and tell Mr. Kenyon to come here directly."

"No, no," cried Harry; "don't do that. It would frighten him."

"He must be told, Hal, my lad. Go, Phra."

The boy addressed pointed to his foot.

"If I let its head go, it will sting," he said.

"Oh, I see," said the doctor coolly, and taking a knife from his pocket, he opened it, bent down, and with one cut passed the knife blade through the cobra's neck, with the result that the long, lithe body was set free, as if it had been held in its place by the position of the head, and Phra's leg was released.

But he took his foot very cautiously off the head, which even then moved, as if still connected with the slowly writhing body, for the jaws opened and shut two or three times, the vitality in the creature being wonderful.

But Phra did not stay to see. He stepped quickly to Harry's side and caught his left hand, to hold it for a moment against his throbbing breast, and then ran off as hard as he could go.

Meanwhile, supported on either side by the doctor and his wife,

Harry was led into the former's room, the boy looking rather wild and strange. Here he was seated upon a cane couch, while a draught of ammonia and water was prepared, and held to him to drink.

"Not thirsty," he said, shaking his head.

"Never mind; drink," cried the doctor, and the lad hastily tossed off the contents."

"Nice?" said the doctor, with a smile.

"Horrid; like soap and water," replied Harry. "May I go to sleep?"

"Yes, for a time, if you can."

"But I say, look here, Doctor; when father comes, don't let him be frightened. I'm not going to be very bad, am I?"

"I hope not, Hal. You see, we have taken it in time."

"That's right," said the boy, with a deep sigh, and he closed his eyes at once and let his head subside on the pillow, sinking at once into a kind of stupor, for it was not like sleep.

"Oh, Duncan," whispered Mrs. Cameron, as soon as she felt satisfied that the patient could not hear, "surely he will not die?"

"Not if I can help it, dear," he replied. "That was very brave of you to suck the wound. It may have saved his life."

"Poor, brave, darling boy!" she cried, bursting into a convulsive fit of sobbing, as she sank in her husband's arms, utterly giving way now. "He saved me from the horrible reptile, and was bitten himself."

"Ha! God bless him for it—and spare his life," added the doctor to himself—"that was it, then?"

"Yes, dear," sobbed Mrs. Cameron; "I was going back to take up my work when I heard a rustling sound among the flowers, and looking round I saw the horrible thing dancing and waving itself up and down as they do when a snake-charmer plays to them. I couldn't stir; I couldn't speak. I seemed to be suddenly made rigid; and then it was that Harry saw the state I was in, and came to my help."

"What did he do?" said the doctor, as he tried to calm his wife's hysterical sobs.

"Ran between me and the snake, and struck at it when it darted itself out. It would have bitten me, for it was gradually coming closer to me, and—and—and—oh, it was so dreadful, Duncan dear! I seemed to have no power to move. I knew that if I ran off I should be safe, but I could not stir, only wait as if fixed by the horrible creature's eyes—wait till it darted at and bit me."

"And Harry dashed in between you?"

"Yes, dear. He seized the little bamboo stool, and struck at it. Oh, Duncan! Duncan! don't let him die!"

"Let him die, my dear?" said the doctor, drawing in his breath. "Not if my poor knowledge can save him. But I have great hopes that your brave thoughtfulness will have had its effect. Now go and lie down a bit till you have grown calm. This terrible business has unhinged you."

"No, no, dear ; let me stay."

"I dare not, my dear. You are weak and hysterical from the shock, and I must keep the poor boy undisturbed."

"You may trust me, dear," said Mrs. Cameron ; "I am better now. There, you see I am mastering my weakness. I will master it, and be quite calm, so as to help you to nurse him and make him well."

"May I trust you ? "

"Yes, yes, dear."

"But suppose he is very, very bad ? " whispered the doctor.

"I will be quite calm and helpful then. Afterwards I will not answer for myself."

"Then stay," said the doctor, who examined his patient as he lay there, looking strange and completely stupefied.

"Raise him up a little," said the doctor, after he had mixed some more ammonia and water ; "I want him to drink this."

Mrs. Cameron's task was easy, and there was no trouble then in getting the patient to drink, till the last spoonful or two, which he thrust away.

"It hurts me to swallow," he muttered, as if to himself—"it hurts me to swallow."

The doctor frowned, as he helped his wife to lower the poor fellow down, and examined the wrist and arm, which were now becoming terribly swollen and blotched.

"Oh, Duncan ! " whispered Mrs. Cameron, "can't you do something more ? "

"No," he said sadly ; "one is fearfully helpless in such a case as this. Everything possible has been done ; it is a fight between nature and the poison."

"And there seemed to be no time before I was trying to draw it out of the wound again."

"It is so horribly subtle," said the doctor. "What you did ought to have checked the action, but it is going on. I dread poor Kenyon's coming, and yet I am longing for it. He cannot be long."

"Duncan," whispered Mrs. Cameron, as she laid her hand tenderly upon Harry's forehead, "are you sure that he cannot understand what we say ? "

"Quite."

"You said the poison was subtle ; will it be long before the effect passes off ? "

"No," replied the doctor ; "the danger should be quite at an end before an hour is passed. Subtle ? Horribly subtle and quick, dear. I have known poor creatures die in a quarter of an hour after being struck. Hist ! I can hear Kenyon's steps in the garden. Go to the door and bring him in."

Mrs. Cameron went out softly, but returned with Phra.

"Is Mr. Kenyon coming ? "

"He went down the river in his boat, Michael says, and will not be back till evening."

"Tut—tut—tut!" ejaculated the doctor.

"How is he?" whispered Phra.

"Bad; very bad," replied the doctor.

"Oh!" cried Phra, in agony. "But you are curing him, Doctor Cameron?"

"I am doing everything I possibly can, Phra."

"Yes, I know; and you are so clever. It is all right, and he will soon be better."

The doctor groaned, and bent over his patient, exchanging glances with his wife—looks both full of despair.

Phra stepped to the doctor's side, and caught him fiercely by the arm.

"You frighten me," he whispered excitedly. "Don't say he is very bad!"

"Look," said the doctor sadly, and he pointed to the horrible appearance of his young patient's arm. "It is of no use to disguise it, Phra: the poison of these dreadful reptiles is beyond a doctor's skill."

"But do something—do something!" cried Phra angrily. "You are only standing and looking on. You must—you shall do more."

Mrs. Cameron rose and took the lad's hands, drawing them aside.

"Be patient, Phra," she whispered. "My husband is doing everything that is possible."

"But it is so dreadful," cried Phra. "I saw some one die from a snake-bite, and he looked just like that. But there was no doctor then. Can't he do something more?"

Mrs. Cameron shook her head.

"You know how clever and wise he is, Phra. We must trust him. He knows what is best."

Phra groaned, and sank down despairingly in a chair; but he started up again directly.

"Shall I fetch my father? He is very wise about snake-bites. He would come for Hal."

"He could do nothing," said the doctor gravely. "Be silent, please; I am doing everything that is possible."

Phra frowned on hearing the imperative way in which the doctor spoke, but he did not resent it. He merely went on tip-toe to the head of the couch, and knelt down there, watching every movement on Harry's part, though these were few.

From time to time the doctor administered ammonia, but it seemed to have not the slightest effect: the swelling went on; the skin of the boy's arm grew of a livid black; and the mutterings of delirium made the scene more painful.

And so three hours passed away, with no sign of Mr. Kenyon, no token given that the danger was nearly passed.

Every one was indefatigable, striving the best to render Harry's sufferings lighter; but all seemed in vain, and at last, as she read truly the look of despair in her husband's face, every palliative he administered seeming to be useless, Mrs. Cameron, after fighting

hard to keep back her grief, threw herself upon her knees by the side of the couch, and burst into a hysterical fit of sobbing.

This was too much for Phra, who, to hide his own feelings, hurried out into the garden, unable as he was to witness Mrs. Cameron's sufferings unmoved.

And now in his utter despair the doctor made no effort to check his wife's loud sobs, feeling as he did that they could do no harm ; and after attending to his patient again, he was about to walk to the window to try and think whether there was anything else that he could do, when to his astonishment Harry opened his eyes, stared round vacantly, and said in sharp tones,—

“ Yes ! What is it ? Who called ? ”

The doctor was at his side in an instant, and caught his hand.

“ Harry, my lad,” he said, “ do you know me ? ”

The boy stared at him strangely, but he had comprehended the question.

“ Know you ? ” he said. “ Yes ; why shouldn't I know you ? What a ridiculous question ! But——Here, what is the matter with that lady ? Is it—is it——? My head aches, and I can't think,” he added, after looking wonderingly about. “ What has been the matter ? Doctor Cameron, has some one been ill ? ”

“ Yes, some one has been very ill,” said the doctor, laying his cool hand upon the boy's forehead and pressing him back upon the pillow.

“ Some one has been very ill ! Who is it ? Can't be father or Mike. Why am I here ? I'm not ill. Here, something hurts me, doctor—something on the wrist. Just look ; it hurts so that I can't lift it.”

The doctor took hold of the frightfully swollen arm, and made as if examining the injury, saying quietly,—

“ Oh, it's only a bite ; it will be better soon. I'll put a little olive oil to it. Will you get some, my dear ? ”

Mrs. Cameron rose from her knees quickly, and hurried out of the room, keeping her head averted so that Harry should not see her face.

He noticed this, and his eyes filled with a wondering look.

“ I don't understand it,” he said. “ I'm not at home.”

“ No,” said the doctor quietly. “ You are here, at my house.”

“ Of course ; and that was Mrs. Cameron who went out to get the oil, and——”

He stopped short, and looked about him for some moments. Then in a puzzled way :—

“ There's something I want to think about, but I can't.”

“ Don't worry about it, then. Lie still till you can.”

“ Yes, that will be the best way. Ah ! here she is.”

Mrs. Cameron was back with the oil, and he made her lips quiver, and she had hard work to keep back her tears, as he said,—

“ That's good of you to fetch it. Thank you, Doctor. What was it bit me ? One of those big mosquitoes ? Ah ! ”

He uttered a wild cry, and his face grew convulsed with horror.

"What is it, my dear boy?" said the doctor.

"I know now," he said, in a low, passionate, agitated voice.

"It has come back. The snake! I was bitten by that snake!"

"Yes, my boy, but the effect is all passing off," said the doctor soothingly.

"No, no; you are saying that to keep me from thinking I shall die of the bite, and—" his voice sank to a whisper, as he murmured despairingly, "Oh, father, father! what will you do?"

"I am not cheating you, Harry," said the doctor, leaning over him; "it is the simple truth. You were bitten by the virulent reptile; but fortunately we were close by, and the poison has yielded to the remedies."

"Ah! you gave me something?"

"We did, of course," said the doctor gravely, giving his wife a glance. "You have been delirious and insensible, but the poison is mastered, and you have nothing to do now but get well. Thank God!"

The boy took the last words literally. He closed his eyes, and they saw his lips move in the silence which lasted for some minutes.

Then he opened his eyes, and spoke quite naturally.

"I can recollect all about it now. But tell me, are you sure Mrs. Cameron was not hurt?"

"Hurt? No, Harry," said that lady, taking his hand, to press it to her lips. "I have you to thank for saving my life."

He imitated her action, and said with a smile,—

"No, no. Doctor Cameron would have cured you as he did me. But ugh! what an arm!" he cried, hastily drawing the sleeve over the discoloured, swollen skin. "I say, doctor, it won't stop like that, will it?"

"Oh no, that will soon pass away."

At that moment Phra's piteous face appeared at the window, looking inquiringly in, for he had been puzzled by the voices he had heard; and as soon as he grasped the state of affairs, he uttered a wild cry,—

"Hal!"

It was as he rushed in through the window and dashed across the floor, to pretty well fling himself upon his companion. Then, with simulated anger, to choke down the burst of sobs striving for exit,—

"Oh, you wretch!" he cried, "to frighten us all like that! Doctor, what doesn't he deserve!"

"Rest and quiet, Phra, my lad. Steady, please; he is a bit weak yet."

"Yes, I understand. But oh, Hal, old chap, old chap! you have made me feel bad!"

"So sorry," said the boy, "and so glad you all felt like that. But, Phra, I want you to do something."

"Yes, what is it?" cried Phra eagerly.

"I want you to go up to our place and wait till father comes back. Then tell him I'm better. I shouldn't like him to hear I had been bitten by a naga without knowing the whole truth."

"Yes, I'll go," cried the boy, pressing his friend's hand. "But tell me first, doctor : he is ever so much better ? "

"Quite out of all danger now," was the reply, and Phra started off, but only to find that he was too late, for before he had gone a hundred yards he met Mr. Kenyon and Mike, running.

"Ah !" cried the merchant wildly, catching Phra by the arm, "tell me quickly—the truth—the truth."

"Better ; getting well fast," said Phra quickly.

Mr. Kenyon stopped short and laid his hand to his breast, and stood panting for a few minutes before speaking again.

"Mike told you as soon as you came ashore, then ? "

"No, he came down the river in a boat to fetch me, as soon as he heard the news. But come, quick, I must see for myself ! "

As Mr. Kenyon entered the room the doctor and his wife just said a word, and then went softly out, Phra grasping the reason and following them into the garden.

"Yes, I see," he said softly ; "to let them be alone."

They all three turned down one of the paths amongst the thickly planted bushes, and then stopped short in wonder, for there just before them was Mike, crying like a child, and wiping his eyes.

He was aware of their presence, though, almost as soon as they were of his, and making a pretence of mopping his face with the handkerchief he held, he hurried up.

"Awful hot, sir," he said. "You want me ? "

"No, not yet," said the doctor, ignoring the tears ; "but in two or three hours I think we can get your young master home. I think you had better see about a palanquin and bearers by-and-by. Or perhaps you might as well go now, and tell the men to be here in two hours' time."

"Yes, sir ; of course, sir, but—er—"

"What is it ? " said the doctor.

"Could I just go and say a word to the young master, sir ? "

"I think not now, Mike. His father is with him, and we have left them so that they might be alone."

"Of course, sir, and quite right too," said Mike. "I'll be off at once, sir ; but it is amazing hot."

Mike hurried away, and as soon as he was out of hearing Phra said quickly,—

"See how he'd been crying, Mr. Cameron ? "

"Yes, Phra."

"That's because he liked our Hal so. Every one likes Hal."

CHAPTER XII
SUL THE ELEPHANT

"BOTHER the old cobra ! Don't say any more about it ; I hate to hear the thing mentioned. Well, there, quite well, thank you ; how do you do ? "

"But you might tell me, Hal."

"Why, I am telling you. I'm quite well again."

"Don't you feel anything ? "

"Oh yes, just a little ; my arm feels pins-and-needlesy, just as if I had been to sleep on it in an awkward position ; and it looks as if it was turning into a snake."

"What, twists and twines about ? "

"No—o—o—o ! What nonsense ! How can a thing with stiff bones in it twist and twine about ? I mean, the skin's all marked something like a snake's ; but Dr. Cameron says I need not mind, for it will all go off in time. Oh, I am so sick of it all ! I wish I hadn't killed the snake."

"What !" cried Phra.

"No, I don't quite mean that, because of course I'm glad to have killed the horrible, poisonous thing ; only it's so tiresome. That's nearly a month ago, and everybody's watching me to see how I look, and asking me how I am, and you're about the worst of the lot."

"It's quite natural, Hal."

"Is it ? Then I wish it wasn't. I suppose it's quite natural for Mrs. Cameron to begin to cry as soon as she sees me."

"It's because she feels grateful to you for saving her life."

"There you go again," cried Harry peevishly. "Saving her life ! Oh, how I wish I hadn't ! Everybody will keep telling me of it, and one says it was so good of me, and another calls me a brave young hero ; and just because I hit a snake a whack with an old bamboo stool. It's sickening."

Phra laughed heartily.

"You're not sorry you saved her life."

"Will you be quiet ? " cried Harry angrily. "Saved her life again. Everybody's telling me of it. Of course I don't mean I'm sorry, but I wish somebody else had done it. Ah ! you, for instance," cried the boy, with one of his old mirthful looks. "Ha, ha, ha ! Poor old Phra ! How would he like it ? every one calling him a brave young hero ! "

"I shouldn't mind it once or twice," said Phra thoughtfully. "But after that I suppose it would be rather tiresome."

"Tiresome ! " cried Harry. "It sets your teeth on edge—it makes you squirm—it makes you want to throw things that will break—it makes you want to call names, and kick."

Phra roared.

"Ah, you may grin, my lad, but it does."

"It would make me feel proud," said Phra.

"That it wouldn't. You're not such a silly, weak noodle. It would make you feel ashamed of yourself, for it's sickly and stupid to make such a fuss about nothing. No, don't say any more about it, or there'll be a fight."

"I say, Hal," cried Phra. "I shall be glad when you are quite well again."

"I am quite well again. Look here, I'll race you along the terrace and back."

"No, it makes one too hot. But you're not quite well yet."

"I am, I tell you. Do you want to quarrel?"

"No, but that proves you are not."

"How? What do you mean?"

"You get cross so soon. It's just as if that snakebite——"

"Don't!" roared Harry.

"Turned you sour and acid."

Harry did not resent this, but remained silent for a few moments.

"I say," he said at last, "is that true?"

"What?"

"About me turning sour and acid?"

"Oh yes; you get out of temper about such little things. I'm almost afraid to speak to you sometimes."

"Hi! Look at him! There he goes. One of those little monkeys. He heard me shout. How he can jump from tree to tree! I wish we were as active. There! He can't jump to that next tree. He'd fall down. Well! Look at that. Why, it was a tremendous jump."

"We were here just right," said Phra; "he was coming after the fruit, and we scared him."

Harry was silent, and walked on by his companion's side in the beautiful gardens of the palace. Then he began to whistle softly, as if he were thinking. At last he broke out with—

"Oh, what a lovely garden this is! I wish my father was a king, and I was a prince, and all this was ours."

Phra threw himself down on the grass beneath a clump of shrubs and began to laugh heartily.

"What are you laughing at?" said Harry angrily.

"You. Why, you wouldn't like it half so well as what you have now."

"Oh, shouldn't I! I know better than that."

"No, you don't, Hal. That is all my father's, and it will be all mine some day; but I like being at your place ever so much better than being here."

"You don't. Nonsense!"

"I do, I tell you. Your little garden's lovely, and the dear old landing-place is ten times nicer than our marble steps."

"You've been out in the sun too much, Phra, and it has turned your head."

"That it hasn't. And as to your father being king, he'd soon be very tired of it, as my father is ; for it's all worry and care."

Harry had thrown himself sprawling on the grass beside his companion, and the boys were both silent for a while, as if listening to the soft cooing of one of the beautiful little rose and green doves which frequented the garden.

"It's very curious," said Harry at last.

"What is ?" said Phra wonderingly.

"That the poison of that snake—such a wee, tiny drop as got into me—should have such a droll effect."

"I don't see anything droll in it," replied Phra.

"I do," cried Harry. "Here, only a little time ago I was the jolliest, best-tempered fellow that ever lived."

"Ho, ho, ho !" laughed Phra.

"Well, so I was," cried Harry indignantly.

"When you weren't cross."

"Oh, I say, I never was cross ; but I'll own to it now. I've often thought about it lately. You're quite right, Phra ; the least thing does put me out now, and I feel as if I must grind my teeth together. Think it is because of the poison ?"

"Of course it is. But never mind. I don't, because I know why it is."

"I have been very cross, then, sometimes, have I ?"

"Horrid !" cried Phra, laughing. "You've been ready to call the sun names for shining, and the wind for blowing. You can't think how cross you've been."

"I can guess. It's what Dr. Cameron calls being a trifle irritable. Hullo ! here's one of your fellows coming. Looks just as if he were going to spear us both for being in the King's garden."

A handsome, bronze-skinned guard stalked up and bowed to Phra.

"What do you want ?" asked Phra.

"The hunter, Sree, asks to see the Prince," replied the man.

That was enough. There was neither irritability in Harry, nor thought of the heat in Phra, as they sprang up and made for the outer court, where they found Sree sitting upon his heels, calmly meditative over his thoughts, but ready to spring up on seeing the two lads approach.

He saluted them after the country fashion, and in reply to the question asked by both together,—

"I came to see if the young Sahib Harry was well enough to go out, and the Prince would go with him."

"Of course I'm well enough," cried Harry. "I say, Sree, have you seen any cobras since that one bit me ?"

Phra turned sharply round, with his face full of the mirth he tried to hide.

"Yes, I know what you mean," cried Harry sharply. "I shall talk about it myself, though, if I like. Have you seen any, Sree ?"

"Just one hundred and seven, Sahib," said the man.

"A hundred and seven!" cried Harry. "What, about here?"

"About the different houses and landings, Sahib," replied the old hunter. "They like to get near to where people live, because of the little animals that come too."

"I shouldn't have thought that there were so many for miles and miles."

"Oh yes, Sahib; there are many nagas about."

"You must have seen the same ones over again," said Harry.

"No, Sahib; it was not so, because I killed as many as I said."

"Killed them!"

"Yes, Sahib; when I knew that you had been bitten, I felt that I must have been neglectful, and I set to work seeking for nagas with my two men, and we killed all those. You see, it is easy. When you find one, there is sure to be its husband or its wife somewhere near."

"Then you killed all those because I was bitten?" said Harry.

"Yes, Sahib, and we are going to kill more. They are dangerous things. Would the Sahib like to go out to-day?"

"Yes, we should; shouldn't we, Phra?"

"Yes, if you—"

Phra got no farther, on account of the sharp look Harry darted at him.

"Have you anything particular you have tracked down?"

"I have done nothing but hunt nagas lately, Sahib, because I did not know when the Sahib would come again; but the jungle is full of wild creatures, and the river the same. Would Sahib Harry like to go right up the river in a boat, or would he like a ride through the jungle with an elephant?"

"What do you say, Phra?" asked Harry.

"We had a boat out last time," said Phra. "Which you like, though."

"But could you get an elephant? Would your father—"

"Of course," said Phra eagerly. "How soon shall we go?"

"I should like to go directly."

"Then we will go directly. I'll order an elephant to be brought round at once."

He went towards the palace, and Harry followed him with his eyes.

"It's nice," he thought, "to be able to order everything you want like that. To tell the people to bring round an elephant, just as I might give orders for a donkey. Well, it's just the same, only one's bigger than the other, and costs more to keep. It is nice, after all, to be a king or a prince. Phra says it isn't, though, and perhaps one might get as much fun out of a donkey, and if he kicked it wouldn't be so far to fall."

He turned suddenly, to find that the old hunter's eyes were fixed sharply upon him.

"Does the young Sahib feel any pain now from the snake-bite?"

Harry frowned at the allusion, but the question was so respectfully put that he replied quietly,—

“A good deal sometimes, Sree, but my arm is better.”

“Be out in the sun all you can, Sahib, and let the hot light shine upon it to bring life and strength back to the blood.”

Harry nodded.

“There is death in the serpent’s poison, but life in the light of the sun, Sahib. Sree’s heart was sore within him when he heard the bad tidings, for he feared it meant that the young Sahib’s days were at an end.”

“But you never came near me, Sree, while I was bad.”

“But I knew, Sahib, and I was busy—oh, so busy! One hundred and seven of the little wretches.”

“Oh yes,” said Harry, “I had forgotten that. But come along; the Prince is coming out again.”

By the time they reached the court Phra was there, with men carrying out guns, belts, and flasks, with net-bags to hold anything they might shoot; and before this was quite done a peculiar scrunching sound was heard, and directly after the prominent fronted grey head of a huge elephant appeared, as the great quadruped came on, walking softly, and swaying its long trunk from side to side, while upon its neck sat a little ugly man not bigger than a boy, hook-spurred goad in hand, and with his legs completely hidden by the creature’s great, leathery, flap ears.

“You’ve got the biggest one, Phra,” said Harry.

“Yes, he takes longer strides, and I like him; don’t I, Sul?” said the lad, giving the *u* in the animal’s name the long, soft sound of double *o*.

The elephant uttered a peculiar sound, and twining his truck round Phra’s waist, lifted him from the ground.

“No, no, I am going up by the ladder,” said Phra, laughing, and at a word the huge beast set him down again, and raised his trunk to receive a petting from Harry, who was an old friend.

It seemed strange for the great beast with its gigantic power to be so obedient and docile to a couple of mere lads, and the insignificant mahout perched upon its neck. But so it was: at a word the elephant knelt, a short, bamboo ladder was placed against its side, and the boys climbed up; the guns and ammunition were handed in by Sree, who was particular to a degree in seeing that everything was placed in the howdah that was necessary; and then he took his own place behind the lads.

Without being told, a couple of the men drew the ladder away, and the mahout grasped his silver-mounted goad, all attention for the word.

Phra gave this, and then it was like a boat mounting a wave and plunging down the other side, as the elephant rose, and without seeming to exert itself in the least, began to shuffle over the ground.

“Just like two pairs of stuffed trousers under a feather bed,” as Harry termed it.

Sree gave the mahout his directions, and very soon the river was left far behind, and they were following one of the elephant tracks through the wooded district which lay between the river and the jungle proper—the primitive wild, much of which had never been trodden by the foot of man.

Here the trees had gone on growing to their full age, and fallen to make way for others to take their places, the roots of the young literally devouring the crumbled-up touchwood over which they had spread their boughs, while creepers and the ever-present climbing and running palm, the rotan, bound the grand, forest monarchs together, and turned the place into an impenetrable wild, save where the wild elephants had formed their roads and traversed them even to taking the same steps, each planting its huge feet in the impressions made by those which had gone before.

"Are we going to begin shooting at once, Sree?" asked Harry.

"No, Sahib; not here. Too many people have been about, and everything is shy and hides. Wait till we get into some of the open places in the wild jungle."

This was while they were in the more open woodland; but soon this was left behind, and they were in the twilight of the great forest, going through a tunnel arched over by big trees, and with very little more than room for their huge steed to pass without brushing the sides.

Every here and there the gloom was relieved by what looked like a golden shower of rain, where the sun managed to penetrate; but, as soon as this was passed, the darkness seemed deeper than before.

The first part of this savage wild lay low, and the huge footprints made by the wild elephants were full of mud and water; but Sul did not seem in the least troubled. According to the custom of his kind, he chose these holes in preference to the firm ground between, his feet sometimes descending with a loud splash a couple of feet or so, and being withdrawn with a peculiar *suck*, while the huge beast rolled and plunged like a boat in a rough sea.

"Do you mind this?" said Phra, turning to his companion, as they were shaken together.

"No; I like it," replied Harry. "I say, what a place this must be for the big snakes, and how easily one might dart down half its body and twist round one of us. Don't you feel a bit scared?"

"No; but I heard of a hungry one doing that once. I daresay we should know if one was near."

"How?"

"The elephant seems to see and know whenever he is near anything dangerous."

"Oh, only when there is a tiger or buffalo, Phra."

"This one notices everything, doesn't he, Sree?"

"Yes, Prince; he is a wonderful beast," replied the hunter, who, in spite of the rolling about, had carefully charged the four guns

that had been brought, and replaced them lying upon the hooks within the howdah, ready to be seized at a moment's notice.

"We shan't see anything here," said Phra.

"Too thick," replied the hunter; "but there are plenty of beasts on either side now. In an hour though we shall reach a part where the sun can shine through."

"Hist! Something before us," whispered Phra stretching out his hand for a gun, an act imitated by Harry; for the elephant had suddenly stopped, thrown up its trunk, and as it gave vent to a rumbling sound which ended in the loud, highly-pitched cry which is called trumpeting, it shook its head from side to side, striking the branches with the ends of its long, sharp-pointed tusks, which were hooped in two places with bands of glistening silver.

"You had better take a gun too, Sree," said Harry, in a low voice, and the old hunter eagerly availed himself of the permission.

"Mind not to hit the mahout," whispered Phra, for the little turbanned man kept on anxiously looking back; "and you had better be looking out, Hal, for Sul may spin right round and run away."

They sat watching and listening for some minutes, expecting moment by moment to see the cause of their stoppage approaching along the dusk tunnel, and at last, as the elephant ceased to make uneasy signs, Sree handed the gun to Harry.

"What are you going to do?" asked the latter.

"Slip down, Sahib, and go forward to see what startled the elephant."

"Is it safe?"

"Oh yes, Sahib; I should run back if there was danger, and you would fire over my head."

"But you had better have a gun."

The old hunter smiled, and the next minute, he had lowered himself down by the ropes which held on the howdah, reached up for the gun, which was handed down to him, and they saw him go slowly forward, carefully examining the pathway, which fortunately was here fairly free from water, though the earth was soft enough to show the footprints of whatever had passed along.

As if fully comprehending what all this meant, the great elephant made a muttering noise, lowered its trunk, and of its own choice continued its march, following close behind Sree, till the latter began to move more cautiously; and now the elephant raised its head again, and curled its trunk up, throwing it back towards its forehead.

"Means a tiger," whispered Harry.

"Yes; look at Sree. Be ready to fire."

Harry's heart beat fast, and he sat there with his gun-barrels resting on the front of the howdah, ready to fire if the great cat came into view.

The elephant was shifting its weight from foot to foot, giving itself an awkward roll that would be rather bad for a marksman; but otherwise it made no further uneasy signs.

"Tiger," cried Phra, and Sree nodded sharply, before running some little distance on in a stooping position, displaying the activity of a boy, till he was nearly out of sight; but before he was quite so he turned sharply and ran back, stopping about a dozen yards in front of the elephant's head.

"Look, Sahibs," he said, pointing down, "tiger. He came out of the low bush just on your left, and trotted along to here, and then crossed to yonder, twenty paces farther, where he went in among the trees on your right."

"Come back, then, and mount," said Harry anxiously. "The brute may be crouching somewhere ready to spring on you."

"No, Sahib," said the man, smiling; "he has gone right away."

"How can you tell that?" asked Harry.

"Look at Sul, Sahib. He would not stand quietly like that if the tiger was near."

"Yes, that is right," said Phra quietly, and he bade the mahout tell the elephant to kneel.

"Couldn't we follow and get a shot at it?" said Harry excitedly. "No, no, of course not in a place like this," he hastened to add, for unless the path was followed it was next to impossible to move.

The next minute the elephant had knelt, and Sree had scrambled back to his place behind the howdah.

"As there was one here, there may be his mate, Sahib," he said; "so we will keep a good look-out."

"Yes, of course," said Harry, as the elephant strode along quietly enough; "but I say, Phra, we did not come out after tigers, did we?"

"No, but by accident we are where we may get one. Did you find the pugs as easily as this, when you were out with my father that day?"

"No, Sahib; it was all hard work, and very few footmarks to be found."

"Did you bring us this way hoping that we might shoot a tiger?"

"No, Sahib; I brought you along here so that you might shoot a deer for us to take back. I would not purposely take you where there are tigers; but if we have one tracking us, of course we must shoot, unless you would like to go back."

"Ask the Prince if he would," said Harry. "I mean to go on."

"Go on, of course," said Phra. "I don't think we shall see any more signs of tigers."

And, in fact, they went right on now along this winding tunnel through the jungle without seeing anything, and hearing nothing but the shrieking of parrots now and then, far above their heads, where the tops of the trees spread their flowers or fruit in the bright sunshine, but produced semi-darkness in the jungle beneath.

At last, though, the path grew drier and drier and it was evident that they were ascending a slope, which being pursued for another quarter of an hour, they had the satisfaction of noting that the trees were of less growth, and every now and then there were rays of

light streaming down, till all at once there was a patch of bright sunshine right in front, showing that comparatively open ground lay before them ; while directly after Harry had a glimpse of something dusky fifty yards away, there was the sound of a rush and the breaking of twigs, and then all was silent again.

" Buffalo, wasn't it ? " said Phra.

" Yes, Sahib," replied the old hunter. " Scared away ; but they may return. There were four of them. Be ready, for they might come back and charge at the elephant, big as he is."

But no more was seen of the game they had disturbed, and a few minutes later they were out in full sunshine, the track before them being a wide expanse of park-like ground extended on either slope of a valley, through which a stream ran, half hidden by over-hanging bushes and reeds. Here and there the sun flashed from the running water, but for the most part the stream was invisible.

When they broke out of the jungle they entered a dense patch of grass, which immediately found favour with the elephant, and it began tearing it up in bundles as large as its trunk would embrace ; but this enjoyment was stopped at once, for at a word or two from Sree, the mahout started the animal onward, uttering mild remonstrances the while.

" We will keep along here on the slope, Sahibs," said the hunter. " Be quite ready to fire."

It was an unnecessary order, for both boys were keenly on the look-out, while as soon as he had got over his disappointment at not being allowed to tuck small trusses of the succulent grass into his capacious maw, Sul showed how well trained a hunting elephant he was, taking up the beating in the most matter-of-fact way, and as if thoroughly entering into the spirit of the chase.

" What shall we get along here, Sree ? " asked Harry, as they rode on, with the long grass and bushes rustling and snapping about the elephant's feet.

" Who knows, Sahib ? Perhaps pig, which will make for the low ground yonder by the stream, or peacock, and they will rise and fly to our left for the shelter of the jungle. Maybe it will be a buffalo, who will charge us, and then it will be better that I should fire too, for the great obstinate brute ought to be stopped before it reaches Sul. He would take the buffalo on his tusks, but these beasts are so strong that he might be hurt, and that would be a pity ; it makes an elephant unsteady."

" I thought you said we might get a deer," said Phra.

" It is very likely, Sahib," replied the man. " Who knows what we may find in such a beautiful hunting-country, where no one disturbs the beasts ? Ah, look ! "

For at that moment Sul uttered a warning sound which can best be represented by the word *Phoomk*, and stopped short, but without curling up his trunk out of the way of some charging enemy.

The boys raised their guns to their shoulders, and waited for a chance to fire, but there was nothing seen save the waving and

undulating of the long grass to their left, as if something were making for the jungle—something long, like a gigantic serpent.

"Shall I fire?" said Phra.

"It is of no use, Sahib," replied Sree; "the cover is too deep."

"What is it?" said Harry hoarsely—"a boa?"

"No, Sahib; a little troop of small monkeys following an old one. They have been down to the water to drink, and they are running back to the jungle trees."

"Oh, we don't want to shoot them," said Harry; "go on."

The elephant obeyed a touch from the goad, and shambled along, making the long grass swish, while he muttered and grumbled as if dissatisfied at there being no firing. But before they had gone a hundred yards farther he gave warning again, and almost at the same moment there was a loud grunting, a rush to the right, and two reports rang out as both boys fired.

This was followed by a sharp squeal, but the undulation of the grass did not cease, and from their position high up the two lads caught sight from time to time of the blackish-brown backs of three or four good-sized pigs.

"We hit one," cried Harry excitedly. "Send Sul on. It must be lying dead."

"No, Sahib," said Sree. "You hit one, but they have all gone off."

"How do you know? Perhaps one is lying there in the long grass."

"No, Sahib," said the man; "you would have seen it struggling, and heard its shrieks. A pig makes much noise. But I saw the one hit, and it only gave a jump. You both fired the wrong barrels."

"What!" cried Phra, examining his gun, with Harry following suit.

"The right barrels are for shot, the left barrels for ball," said Sree quietly. "Those shot would kill a peacock, but only tickle the thick skin of a wild pig."

"How stupid!" said Harry. "I never thought of that. Here, load again."

He handed his gun to the hunter, and took up another from the hooks inside the howdah, while Sul went on, muttering to himself, but there appeared from the sound to be more satisfaction in his remarks at the efforts made, though there had been no result.

So comical was all this that the boys laughed heartily, and there was a grim smile on Sree's countenance.

"It seems so droll," said Phra merrily. "It is just as if he knew all about it."

"He does, Sahib," said the hunter.

"Nonsense!" said Harry.

"The Sahib has not seen so much of elephants as I have," said the man respectfully. "He believes that I have learned much about the wild creatures of the jungle?"

"Oh yes, you have, Sree ; but I can't believe elephants understand what we are doing."

"The wild elephant is one of the wisest of beasts, Sahib, and he would never be caught, he is so cunning, if it was not that we cheat him by sending elephants that we have trained to the herd to lead others into traps. And when they have got them there, do they not beat them and hold them till they are noosed and their spirit is conquered ?"

"Oh yes, they do all that."

"And many other things," said Sree, "that I have seen with the Sahibs in India, where they move and pile the trees that are cut down, and lift guns ; and what beast will obey its master better than an elephant ? Old Sul here is very wise, and knows a great deal."

"Yes," said Harry, "but not to understand what we say."

"But he knows what the order means, Sahib ; and see how he enjoys the hunting."

"Yes, Sul really does like hunting, Hal," said Phra.

"And it is not only elephants that like hunting," continued Sree. "See how the horses and dogs love the hunting in India, and the horses the pig-sticking. I have seen them enjoy it as much as the Sahibs. They never want the spur, but go wonderfully fast, as soon as they see a fierce, wild boar. Ah, Sahib, animals are wiser than we think, and love us back again if we love them. Old Sul here loves me better than he does his driver ; but I am afraid of him. He loves me too well."

"That sounds funny, Sree," said Harry. "What do you mean ?"

"He likes to show me how much he loves me by rubbing up against me ; and if he tries to do that when he has me by a tree or one of the palace walls, I am obliged to be quick and get under him ; he is so big and heavy. But here is your gun."

Meanwhile the object of these remarks had been forcing his way through the grass and bushes, winking his little red eyes as if enjoying the conversation, and flapping his great ears, his absurdly small tail whisking about and making dashes at troublesome flies, while his great trunk seemed to possess an independent existence, twining and waving, swaying this way and that, and never for a moment still.

But all the while the great, sensible creature was intent upon the object in hand, pushing steadily forward through the dense growth, and starting numberless occupiers of the long grass—snakes, lizards, rats, and mice, scurrying away to avoid the pillar-like legs which invaded their home.

"Don't seem as if we are going to have much sport," said Harry at last, "and it's precious hot out here."

The words had hardly passed his lips when Sul uttered a deep grunt and stood fast, for he had startled a small deer from its lair, the graceful creature making a sudden bound into sight close to the elephant's feet, and then going right forward in a succession

of leaps, so that its course hindered the boys from firing until it had gone forty yards, when both guns rang out sharply, Sul remaining firm as a rock.

"Hit!" cried Sree, for the deer fell heavily, struggled in the thick growth for a few moments, then gained its feet and made another bound into sight—a bound which paralysed the arms of the two lads and made them hold their breath, for as the deer made what was veritably its death leap, something of a tawny yellow and brown mingled made a tremendous bound on to it, bringing it down among the bushes with a dull, crashing sound, and then all was still.

CHAPTER XIII THEIR FIRST TIGER

THOUGH the two boys seemed to be turned to stone, others were active enough.

Sree leaned over the back of the howdah and took the boys' guns from their hands. "Quick, Sahibs!" he cried; "take the other guns and be ready."

The boys obeyed mechanically, while Sree began to re-charge the empty barrels, calling to the mahout to turn the elephant and go back.

But Sul had ideas of his own in connection with elephant-hunting, and absolutely refused to obey that order even though it was emphasized with the sharp goad.

Understand or no, according to Sree's theory, he had sense enough to decline doing what many of his kind would have done under the circumstances—to wit, turning tail. For Sul seemed to know that though his insignificant tail with its tuft at the end was a formidable weapon to deal with teasing flies, that end of his person was absurdly useless for fighting tigers, whereas his other end, when his trunk was thrown up out of the way, with its two sharp-pointed clear lengths of ivory, was about the most formidable object the great, ferocious cat could encounter.

Consequently, as soon as in obedience to Sree's orders the goad was applied, Sul uttered a shrill remonstrance, curled up his trunk, threw his head from side to side, and then as if declaring that he didn't care a *sou* for the biggest tiger that ever grew, he trumpeted out defiance and began a performance that was wonderfully like his idea of a war dance, which threatened to shake the occupants out of the howdah.

"Turn him back and get away," cried Sree angrily, in the Siamese tongue.

"Says he won't go and wants to fight," replied the mahout.

Sul uttered a fierce cry, and ceasing his dance opened his ears widely, and began to advance.

"You must turn him back," cried Sree excitedly, as he finished ramming down bullets in every barrel.

"I can't," came back from the mahout, in a helpless tone.

"Never mind," cried Harry; "let's go on," and he changed his gun for one that had been reloaded.

"But it is too dangerous for you, Sahibs," cried Sree. "It is a big tiger. Do you hear me? Turn the elephant back."

"No," said Phra hoarsely, as he stood up in the howdah. "I say he shall go on."

Sul trumpeted again, while Sree rammed down bullets in the other guns, and in answer to the elephant's challenge the hidden tiger uttered a deep, muttering roar.

"We can't help ourselves, Hal," said Phra through his set teeth. "We must go on."

"Yes," replied Harry, cocking both barrels of his gun; "I wouldn't have tried for it, but we must hunt this beast."

There was only one way of avoiding the encounter, and that was by sliding off over the elephant's tail, which would have been a far wilder proceeding. But this neither of the boys had the slightest inclination to do, for the elephant was still moving cautiously forward, and fully realizing now that there was nothing to be done but to assume the offensive, Sree became silent, contenting himself with cocking both the guns he held and standing ready either to hand them to the boys or fire himself.

Harry, too, set his teeth as he looked over the elephant's flapping ears towards the spot where he knew the tiger must be crouching upon the stricken deer, and while, step by step, as if to give his masters the opportunity of using their deadly weapons Sul slowly advanced, the tiger raised its head from its prey and uttered a warning roar to frighten the elephant back.

"Oh, if he would only show himself!" thought Harry.

But the elephant did not respond to the threat by turning back, for he meant to fight, and was ready to impale his enemy should he get a chance; and to this end he still went on, till all at once, about a dozen yards from his head, the tiger leaped up into sight and stood lashing his sleek, glistening sides as if to add to the number of stripes with his tail.

The words were on the old hunter's lips, "Fire, fire!" but before they were uttered two reports rang out, there was a terrific, snarling yell, and the tiger leaped high in the air and then dropped back, crouching out of sight.

"Good, good!" whispered Sree, and forgetting entirely now all about the objections to the boys joining in a tiger hunt, he was about to bid the mahout advance. But the order was unnecessary. Sul was as eager as the boys, and he moved steadily on, while the latter leaned forward, seeking for the first sign of the striped skin, so as to fire again.

They had not long to wait, for Sul had advanced but very few yards before with a terrific roar the tiger rose and leaped forward.

The sudden advance checked the elephant, which stopped short, giving the boys a steady shot each, but without the slightest effect

upon the tiger, which made two or three bounds and then launched itself at the elephant's head.

But Sul was ready for it, and caught the savage brute on his tusks and threw it back as easily as a bull would toss an attacking dog.

Cat-like, the tiger fell upon its feet, and crouched to spring again, but before it could launch itself forward a couple more shots cooled its savage ardour, and it crouched down, turned its head, and bit angrily at one shoulder, from which the blood was starting.

Sul seized the opportunity and rushed forward to crush his enemy beneath his feet. But wounded though it was, the tiger was aware of the attack, and leaping aside let the great animal thunder by, and then, following quickly, made a tremendous leap and lighted on the elephant's hind quarter, holding on by tooth and nail.

Sul uttered a terrific blast and continued his course, shuffling along at a tremendous pace, forcing those who rode in the howdah to think of nothing but preserving their position and keeping the guns from being shaken out. But at the end of a few moments the peril in which Sree stood came strongly to Harry's attention, for the man could do nothing but hold on by the back of the howdah, after thrusting the gun he had been loading, forward by Phra's side.

It was a perilous task, and required plenty of nerve, but Harry mastered his shrinking. He glanced over the back of the howdah, to find himself face to face with the tiger, whose wildly dilated eyes seemed to be blazing with rage, and for a moment or two he shrank away.

But recovering himself a little he made sure of the gun he held being cocked, and catching tightly hold by the side of the howdah, he rested the gun-barrels on the back, holding the stock as if it were a pistol.

But now he was so insecure that he felt as if at any moment he must be pitched over backward on the tiger, and firing seemed quite out of the question.

Still it had to be done, and he knew that he must do it, and at once.

Dropping on his knees, he shuffled himself close to the back, bringing himself so near to the tiger that as he reached over with the gun he could touch the savage brute with the muzzle.

He knew that if he stopped to think he should not dare to do it, while as he leaned over he was saluted by a savage roar, and the tiger began to claw its way up to leap at him.

But there was not time, for Harry rested the muzzle of his piece between the creature's eyes, feeling it pressed back towards him. Only for an instant, though, for he drew trigger, there was a roar mingled with the sharp report, and with one spasmodic movement the tiger gathered itself up almost into a ball and fell back among the long grass, where it lay writhing in agony.

The effect on Sul was immediate. He stopped short and swung

round, nearly throwing his riders off as he ran back to where the tiger lay, and drove one tusk through the monster, pinning it to the ground, with the result that the beast writhed a little, and then stretched itself out, dead.

"Yes, he is dead enough, Sahib ; but Sul has made a dreadful hole in his skin."

This was after Sree had slipped down from the back of the elephant, and walked close up.

"Make quite sure," said Harry, who with Phra was looking on.

"There's no doubt about it, Sahib. You made sure with that last shot in his head. Feel if he's dead, Sul," he said, in the Siamese tongue.

The elephant grunted and muttered, and seemed for a time unwilling to withdraw his tusk ; but he evidently understood the order, and at last backed a little, the action dragging the tiger with him, till he gave his head a shake, and the body dropped off.

After this the elephant cautiously walked over the prostrate foe, and kicked it to and fro from one foot to the other, before feeling it all over with his trunk, and then standing panting with exertion, and breathing hard.

"Get off and help see to his hurts," said Sree to the mahout, who ordered the elephant to kneel, and then climbed along his back by holding on to the sides of the howdah, till he reached the places where the tiger's teeth and claws had been struck into the thick hard skin.

Some nasty places had been made, but there was nothing serious the matter. All that was necessary was to keep the ever-active flies away, and this was done by some very rough but effective surgery, consisting in filling up the wounds with mud, the elephant grumbling and muttering, but evidently appreciating the treatment, keeping perfectly still the while.

"Poor old chap !" said Harry, who had dismounted to examine the dead tiger and pet the elephant by stroking his trunk. "But what about getting the game home ? "

"I shall begin skinning it at once, Sahib," said Sree quietly ; "but I want you to get back into the howdah and keep a good watch. This fellow has very likely a companion somewhere near, and she may come and attack us."

"Think so ? " said Harry.

"Oh yes," interposed Phra ; "it is very likely. But I say, Hal, we're not going to have our prize skinned yet."

"No, that's what I thought. We must take it home for every one to see. Sul would carry it home on his back."

"I don't know ; he has never been taught ; but we'll try."

He spoke to Sree, who looked doubtful, and in turn consulted the mahout before saying more.

"Sul is such a big, noble animal, Sahibs," he then said, "that he has never been set to carry dead game, that has always been done by a little pad elephant ; but he is so wise that he may be

proud of carrying back the great tiger he has killed. I am going to try him."

The boys smiled at each other, and were amused to see the old hunter go with the mahout to the elephant and bring him up to the dead tiger, which he began to touch with his trunk, ending by taking a turn round the animal and drawing it along a little way.

After this he stood quietly enough while the ropes were unlaced from the howdah ready for hoisting the tiger on to the elephant's back.

"We shall not be strong enough to get it up, I'm afraid," said Sree thoughtfully.

"Look here," said Harry ; "there is a great tree with strong branches yonder ; make Sul drag the tiger under one of the big boughs ; then we can throw the rope over and make him stand underneath, haul the tiger up, and lower it down."

Sree smiled, for the knot which had puzzled him had been untied.

The mahout was brought into requisition, and at the word of command, just as if he fully understood the business required of him, Sul took a turn of his trunk round the tiger's neck and dragged it through the long grass right beneath the great tree, one of the many dotted about park-like on the slope.

The rest was easy. The rope was fastened round the tiger's hind legs, the end thrown over a horizontal branch, and then the willing hands of all four drew the savage brute up some fifteen feet. Here the crucial time came, for there was a doubt still whether Sul would now submit to the huge cat being lowered down upon his back.

But as it happened he placed himself quietly enough where his mahout directed, and the tiger was lowered down, after which Sree climbed up and with the mahout's assistance they laid the body right across the back of the howdah. Then the latter, which had been in a very tottering condition, was carefully secured by its rope, all mounted again in triumph, and the journey back was commenced, Sree carefully seeing to the reloading of the guns and placing them ready, before settling down to his place in the howdah, for he had to sit on the dead tiger and keep it from shifting to right or left.

They had not gone far on their return journey before the old hunter uttered a warning which made the boys catch up and cock their guns, in spite of the determination they had come to of not firing any more that day.

"Are you sure ?" said Phra. "Sul has not made any sign."

"No, Sahib," replied Sree ; "he did not see her, because he has been walking nearly all the time with his eyes turned back to watch the tiger ; for though he is very good, I am sure he does not like having the wicked wretch upon his back."

Five minutes later they drew near the spot where the old hunter had caught a glimpse of a striped side crossing the track they had made in coming, and proof of the keenness of Sree's observation

was given, the elephant throwing up his trunk and trumpeting uneasily.

"It's this wretch's wife, Sahibs," said Sree. "She has been hunting, and is coming back."

"Will she attack us?" said Harry, cocking his gun, and feeling quite ready now for another shot.

"No, Sahib, I think not. Tigers are very cowardly till they are hurt; then they are blind and mad in their rage, and will rush at anything. No; perhaps she may understand that it is her mate that we have here, and follow us; but I do not think she will attack."

"Old Sul does not think so," said Phra. "Look at him, how he keeps on turning his head from side to side, and how high he carries his trunk."

It was plain enough that the great animal was growing more and more uneasy, necessitating constant talking to on the part of the mahout, who spoke sometimes caressingly, at others angrily, and using his goad afterward, as he threatened tremendous punishment and deprivation of all good if his charge did not behave.

"He thinks old Sul means to rush off home as hard as he can go," observed Phra.

"And if he does he'll soon waggle the tiger off his back, won't he, Sree? The tiger must come off if Sul rushes away?"

"I fear so, Sahib. Ah, the tigress must be very near now. Look at Sul's ears."

"She must be slinking along through the grass on this side," said Harry.

"Yes, Sahib; that is where she is, but I don't think she will attack us."

"Shall we send a shot or two in amongst the grass?" said Phra.

"No, Sahib; that would make her come on, and one tiger is enough for to-day."

"Yes, quite," said Phra. "Let's go faster and see if the tiger will stop on."

He said a word or two, and the mahout spoke to the elephant, who wanted no urging, but stretched out in that long, shuffling movement which seems nothing, but goes over enough ground to make a horse use plenty of speed to keep up with it.

But it seemed as if the tigress must still be near, for Sul's trunk formed a curve high in the air, and his ears stood out at a fierce cock, while it needed all the mahout's attention to keep the great creature to one pace, for without the check of the hooked goad he would have gone off at a frantic rate.

For the first few hundred yards the attention of all in the howdah was directed to the tiger, their expectation being that it would slip off on one side or the other; but it was yet soft and yielding, and with Sree's weight upon it the middle sank down lower and lower in the howdah till the head and legs on one side, the hind quarters and long, supple tail on the other, rose higher and higher in the air, and all chance of its causing further trouble was at an end.

It was not until the edge of the jungle was reached, where the elephant path ended, that Sul's trunk had descended to its customary pendent fashion, and his ears ceased to quiver and flap ; but the narrow track in the gloom seemed to be far more suggestive of danger, and Phra suggested that Sree should change his position, kneel down, and keep watch over the elephant's tail, in case the tigress should be following still.

"Yes, Sahib," said the man, and he at once did as was suggested ; but he observed before turning that he did not think there was any fear of an attack in the rear.

"Sul's senses are sharper than mine," he said, "and he would know if we were being tracked."

Sree was right, for there was nothing to cause alarm all the way back. Monkeys were plentiful in one place, and whenever the party came upon an opening, it was made beautiful by flower, bird, and gaily painted insect. These had no charms for the hunters, though, with such a trophy within touch, and at first all their conversation had a connection with the great, white, china-like fangs of the monster, the size of its claws, and the soft beauty and rich colour of its fur.

But as they drew nearer to the end of their journey, with Sul shuffling along at a sober but rapid pace, the conversation became one in which the old hunter was not asked to join.

For now misgivings began to arise as to the reception that might await them when they reached their homes.

"I know how it will be," said Harry ; "father will have heard that I have gone off with you on the elephant, and he will think that I have wilfully disobeyed his orders and been tiger-shooting."

"Why should he think that ? You never do disobey his orders."

"Don't I ?" said Harry dubiously.

"Never," cried Phra.

"I don't know about that," said Harry. "I'm afraid I've gone very near to it sometimes. But I will say I've always been very sorry afterwards."

"And owned to it ?"

"Oh yes," said Harry stoutly ; "I've always owned up at once. Haven't you ?"

Phra was silent.

"Why don't you say yes ?"

"Because it wouldn't be true," said the boy, with a sigh. "I've always wanted to, but sometimes I've felt afraid. You see, my father isn't like yours."

"He's a very nice old chap," said Harry.

"Yes, of course ; but he's a king, and kings can't do like other people."

"I don't see why they shouldn't," said Harry ; "but I say, suppose my father is up at the palace, what are we going to do ? You are sure to catch it for taking the elephant."

"That I'm not. Father said I could have one whenever I liked. I could have three or four if I wanted them."

"But not to go tiger-shooting. Oh, Phra, this has been wonderfully jolly and exciting."

"Splendid."

"Well, splendid; but I am afraid we shall be in a mess."

"We can't be if we speak out. I'm sure I can say honestly that I hadn't the least thought of shooting a tiger when we set off; can't you?"

"No," said Harry bluntly. "I began to feel tigerish as soon as I got in the howdah, and I couldn't think of anything else all the time. I wasn't a bit surprised to see old Sul begin to show signs. No, I can't say right out that I didn't think about tiger-hunting."

"But we didn't go on purpose," said Phra.

"Well, no," said Harry, hesitating, "not quite on purpose, but I couldn't help wishing we might see one."

"Well, you had your wish; but I wish we weren't so late."

"It was all an accident, though," said Harry. "I say, Sree, wasn't it all by accident that we came across a tiger to-day?"

"Yes, Sahib, quite an accident; but we have got one, and I feel very proud of the way in which you two young gentlemen behaved. No old tiger-hunter could have done better."

"But I'm sure father won't like it."

"He will know it was all as it happened, Sahib. You were obliged to shoot the wicked beast. If any one is to blame, it is old Sul, for forcing you to go on."

"Ah, to be sure," cried Harry, laughing merrily. "It was all his fault, Phra, and we'll say so."

"Yes, it's all very well to say so," said Phra, rather gloomily; "but will they believe what we say?"

"My father will believe what I say," said Harry stoutly; "so will yours."

"I hope so," said Phra sadly, "but I don't feel sure."

"I don't think the Sahib Kenyon can be angry," said Sree respectfully, "because it is such a splendid tiger."

"Why, that's just why he will be angry," cried Harry. "He'll be quite furious with me for going out and getting a grand tiger like this when he and the doctor went out as they did, and tried till quite late, and never had a chance."

"Well," said Phra philosophically, "we are very nearly home now, and we shall see. But I wish we hadn't brought the tiger back."

"I don't," said Harry. "It really was an accident."

Very little more was said till they came in sight of the palace, where something important was evidently going on, for they caught sight of the glint of spears and a body of men. A minute later they saw a couple of elephants, and directly after they made out that Mr. Kenyon and Doctor Cameron were there.

Then there was quite a scene of excitement, for some of those present had seen them coming, and when the next moment some one caught sight of the tiger, there was a tremendous shout.

"Hal," whispered Phra, "my father found that we had gone out on an elephant, with guns, and he has sent word to Mr. Kenyon and the doctor, and ordered them to get ready."

"That's it," cried Harry excitedly, "and they were coming in search of us."

"The King will be dreadfully angry," said Phra, "and say I disobeyed his orders."

"And my father will be quite awful," said Harry solemnly. Then changing his tone and speaking with an assumption of lightness which he did not feel, "I don't care; it really was an accident, and we're in for it, and it can't be helped; but here, I say, Sul, you ugly old double-tailed deceiver, do you know you've got us into an awful mess? Sul, I say, do you hear!"

And the elephant said,—

Phoomk!

CHAPTER XIV A YOUNG SAVAGE

THE great elephant approached the group in the courtyard with slow and majestic step, as if proud of the load he bore, and of now being surrounded by a little crowd of spearmen, cheering and shouting loudly.

As they drew near, the two elephants that had been prepared, as was rightly surmised, to go in search of the wanderers, challenged their big companion loudly, Sul sounding his trumpet in reply, but without allowing the excitement around to increase his advance in the slightest degree.

"The young rascals!" said the doctor to Mr. Kenyon. "It's a magnificent tiger, apparently."

"Yes, but Harry ought not to have done this," said Mr. Kenyon. "I am disappointed in him."

"Are you going to give him a talking to now? Rather awkward while he is being made a hero of by the people."

"I am going to wait till I get him home."

"Well, I'm glad to see them safe back again," said the doctor. "I felt certain that they must have met with some mishap. But it is hard that we should be disappointed, and that they should have all the luck."

"Hush!" whispered Mr. Kenyon, for the great elephant had knelt down before the King, ladders had been placed by the attendants on either side, the boys had descended, and helped by some of the men, Sree had slid the tiger off, to be half borne, half dragged, to the King's feet.

But Phra's father did not even glance at it. He gave Harry an angry glance as he approached with his companion, and then fixed his eyes sternly upon his son, who bent down before him.

"You know, sir," he said, in their own tongue, "that it is the duty of my people to obey my commands."

"Yes, father."

"How can we expect them to do so when my own son sets my orders at defiance? I told you I wished you not to go in chase of tigers, did I not?"

"Yes, father."

"Who is to blame for this, you or your companion?"

"Neither of us, sir," broke in Harry, in his blunt, English, outspoken way. "We only went deer-shooting, sir; but the tiger charged us, and of course we were obliged to shoot. Old Sul was most to blame."

The King looked more stern than ever, all but his eyes, which refused to keep his other features in countenance.

"What have you to say, sir?" said the King, turning again to his son.

"The same as Harry Kenyon, father," replied the boy. "The elephant rushed at the tiger, which had struck down a deer we shot."

"Where is the deer you shot?" said the King.

Phra turned to Harry, for the deer had been quite forgotten, and Harry turned to the old hunter, who was kneeling by the tiger.

"Here, Sree," he cried, "what became of that deer we shot?"

The man made a gesture with his hands, and shook his head.

"We forgot all about it, sir," said Harry, laughing frankly. "We had so much to do with killing the tiger and getting it on old Sul's back that we never remembered it any more, did we, Phra?"

"No," said the latter gravely.

"It was all an accident, sir, indeed," said Harry, who was speaking in English. "We were obliged to shoot, sir, really. I'm sure you would have done the same if you had been there."

"That is enough," said the King quietly. "I am glad to hear it was so. It is a painful thing, Harry Kenyon, to feel that one's own son is not to be trusted. Your father felt the same."

"Oh, but he doesn't now, sir. Do you, father?"

"No, Hal; I am quite satisfied."

"A very fine tiger," said the King, going close up to the dead beast; "a splendid specimen. Let it be carefully skinned, and the skin properly dressed."

Sree bowed his lowest, so that his forehead would have touched the ground had not the tiger been there. As it was, he thumped his head against the animal's ribs.

"Who fired the first shot?" said the King, smiling.

The boys looked at one another.

"Both fired together, father," replied Phra.

"Then you will give way to your friend, my son," said the King. "Harry Kenyon, it is yours."

Harry was about to protest in his blunt way, but his father was at his elbow.

"Silence!" he said softly. "Now your thanks."

Harry obeyed, and the King turned to where the little party of English people were standing.

"I am glad it has turned out so well, Kenyon," he said gravely, and with great dignity, as the eyes of all his people were upon him; "but it is disappointing for you and the doctor to see these two boys have such good fortune. You shall have another trial, and we must do away with our objections now. I think the boys deserve to be admitted to the ranks of tiger-hunters."

"Oh!" ejaculated Harry, and the King turned to him.

"You make a bad courtier, Harry," he said, with a very faint smile upon his lip. "I feel that there is no one in my country less afraid of me than you are."

He saluted them, and making a sign to his son to follow, passed into the palace, Phra giving his friends a quick nod of the head and a smile, and then he was hidden from sight by the King's attendants.

"Then we may go back home now, I suppose," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Yes," replied the doctor, "and the sooner the better. As soon as the sun goes in we seem to be in the shade. All is bright and warm while the King is near, but when he goes every one seems to scowl."

Mr. Kenyon gave his friend a meaning look as if saying, "No more now," and laid his hand upon Harry's shoulder.

"You have had quite an exciting time, then, Hal?" he said quietly, as they walked away.

"Oh, wonderfully, father," cried the boy.

"Enjoyed yourself?"

"Well, I don't know that it was enjoying oneself, but I liked killing such a dangerous, mischievous beast."

"And all the time the King and I were fidgeting ourselves and beginning to think, as it grew so late, that some terrible accident had happened to you."

"It isn't so late as you and Doctor Cameron were that time."

"Getting on to be, sir?"

"Don't you think that poor Phra and I were just as anxious about you and the doctor, father?" said the boy mischievously.

"No, indeed I don't," said Mr. Kenyon, laughing. "You are both too thoughtless. And look here, young gentleman, you forget yourself horribly. I never heard anything like it. You must not speak to the King in that free and easy way, just as if he were your equal, before all his people."

"Free and easy?" said Harry, staring. "I thought I was speaking very nicely, father."

The doctor laughed heartily, and Harry's cheeks turned hot with annoyance.

"Why, what did I say that was wrong?"

"It was not the words but the way, my boy," said Mr. Kenyon gravely. "Of course one does not look upon the Prince of a barbaric country like this as one would upon a European monarch; but in the presence of his followers we must not forget that he is a king."

"I did," said Harry frankly; "I felt as if I were speaking to Phra's father and your friend."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mr. Kenyon, as he glanced at the doctor.

"That's right enough, Hal," said the latter; "but we must not presume on the King's kindness to us."

"No, of course not," said Harry thoughtfully. "I'll be more careful, especially as some of the people seem to be jealous of our being so much in favour."

"That's right, Hal; be more careful, for all our sakes."

"Do you think there is any danger, father?" said Harry.

"Danger of what?" said Mr. Kenyon sharply.

"Of the people turning against us and the King."

"Hush! Mind what you are saying, my boy. No; I do not think there is any real danger, and I feel that the best thing for every one is to completely ignore the unpleasant looks we are getting now and then. We are in the right, and I want for our conduct to be such as will gain the respect of the people for our just consideration and honest treatment of them."

"But there is that second king—I say, father, it seems curious for there to be a second king."

"It is the custom of the country, my boy, and in every land there are quaint fashions and I may say parties who are opposed to the ruling power."

"And jealous of the King?"

"Yes, Hal, and of the people he favours."

"That's not pleasant, father," said Hal sharply.

"Not at all," replied Mr. Kenyon. "But I don't think it need trouble us, for we are not arrogant to the people because we are in high favour. I'm sure we do our best, eh, Cameron?"

"That we do," said the doctor heartily. "As for me, I should be a rich man if I charged ordinary fees for what I do."

"Instead of getting disliked," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Oh, but, father," cried Harry, "I know lots of people who almost worship Dr. Cameron for what he has done for them."

"Yes, Hal, and so do I; but unfortunately he offends the native doctors through knowing so much better than they do, and curing patients whom they have condemned to death."

"It's a pity that people will be jealous of those who are more clever."

"It's a natural failing, Hal, my boy," said the doctor, laughing. "But never mind; even those who dislike us are bound to pay us the respect we have earned."

"But you remember what I told you about the people talking in the boat?" said Harry.

"Perfectly."

"You don't think that there will be a revolution, and an attack upon the King and the English people, do you?"

"No, Hal, my boy," said Mr. Kenyon; "I do not, so don't trouble yourself about it. Let's change the conversation. I'm glad you are to have the tiger's skin."

"Yes; I don't think Phra will mind."

"It is a beauty. Was he very hard to kill?"

"Horribly, father;" and with plenty of animation the boy related their adventure.

"We're jealous now, Hal," said the doctor smiling.

"I don't mind that a bit," said the boy. "You must do better, and we two are to come next time you go."

"Well, I suppose so," said Mr. Kenyon gravely. "By the way, Hal, you had the chest of bats and balls. How did you get on? You tried football in the field?"

"Oh, it's a horribly hot, stupid game," said Harry.

"Stupid?" cried the doctor warmly.

"Yes; it's all one or the other. If Phra gets the ball, one does nothing but run after him; and if I get the ball, he has to run after me. And oh! wasn't it hot!"

"When did you play?" said the doctor.

"Oh, in the afternoon."

"You are quite right, my lad," said the doctor drily. "A game at football between two boys with the thermometer standing at over a hundred in the shade, must be a very stupid game indeed."

"Did you ever play it?" said Harry. "I think I've heard you say you did."

"Did I ever play it?" said the doctor scornfully. "I should think I did, and with a couple of good teams. But the thermometer was not at a hundred in the shade, but thirty-five or forty."

"I wish you would play with us next time, Doctor," said Harry eagerly.

"Thank you, my lad, but I would rather be excused."

"Will you show us how to play cricket, then?"

"Yes, but you must get up your two sides. Have you read up anything about it in any book of games and sports?"

"Oh yes, and it says you have eleven and an umpire on each side; but that's nonsense, of course."

"Kenyon," said the doctor with mock solemnity, "do you call this bringing up an English boy properly? It sounds to me quite dreadful. He talks like a young barbarian—as if he had never had any education at all. What did you say, sir?" he continued, turning to Harry.

"What about?"

"There being eleven on a side, and that being nonsense, of course."

"I said so," said Harry, who felt half amused, half annoyed.

"Well, sir, I see that I shall have to take pity on you and young

Phra, and try to make up for your neglected education. We shall have to make a cricket club, and petition the King for a cricket ground ; but I have my doubts about the game proving popular : the work will be too hard."

"But you will help us, Doctor ?"

"Yes, my boy, and I shall prescribe an occasional game for your father. A little exercise will do him good."

"A game of cricket ?" said Mr. Kenyon, starting out of a fit of musing. "Why, I haven't had a bat in my hand for twenty years ! But I don't know—well, yes—I might. I used to be a very tidy bowler, Cameron, and perhaps my hand may be cunning still at delivering twists. But under this tropical sun ? Phew ! I'm rather doubtful."

"Never mind the doubts," said the doctor.

"Here, hullo, my boy ! where are you going ?" cried Mr. Kenyon.

"Only to try and see Phra."

"What ! to-night ? Nonsense ! I daresay he is with his father now, and the news will keep."

Harry looked disappointed, but he said no more, and directly after they had to say good-night to the doctor.

CHAPTER XV FOR THE JUNGLE, HO !

IN due time the skin of the tiger, beautifully dressed, and with the hole made by Sul's tusk so carefully drawn together that the fur concealed the damage, was brought to the bungalow by Sree, who was eager to go upon a fresh expedition ; but another week passed away before matters shaped themselves for this to be made.

Matters had gone on as usual, and the insubordinate words used by the occupants of the boat were half forgotten in the excitement of religious fêtes and illuminations with lanthorns along the river, kite-flying, and discharges of fireworks, in the making of some of which the people, who had learned the art of the Chinese, were adepts.

These fêtes were wonderfully attractive to the two lads, who joined in the processions for the sake of seeing all they could, the royal boat in which they were rowed being one mass of coloured lanthorns swinging from bamboo frameworks, and the effect with the lights reflected in the glassy water was beautiful in the extreme.

"I should enjoy it all so much more, though," Harry said, "if the people would be contented with the bells and the music. They spoil it all with so much gong."

But the Siamese do not shine in music—at least to English taste.

Phra came down to the bungalow some time or other every day, and as often as not Harry returned with him to the palace ;

but he rarely saw the King, who appeared to pass a great deal of his time in study.

Not a day passed without the cricket implements being examined in Phra's room. The bats were handled, the balls taken out of their boxes, and sometimes a little throwing from one to the other, and catching was practised.

At another time the pads which had come with the rest of the things were solemnly tried on, and the room promenaded.

"They seem rather stupid things," said Phra. "I think they'd be best for the football."

"So as to save one's legs from kicks?" said Harry. "Yes, they wouldn't be bad for that, but I suppose they're all right."

"We look rather ridiculous in them, though, Hal."

"Yes, I expect we shall be laughed at; but I don't care. The worst thing about them is that they're so jolly hot. Now let's try on the gloves."

These were carefully put on, the boys' countenances being particularly solemn as the long indiarubber guarded fingers were examined.

Then a thought occurred to Harry, and he struck an attitude.

"What do you say to a fight?" he cried. "We can't hurt one another with our legs guarded and our hands in these gloves. Hit me, and I'll hit you."

"No," said Phra shortly; "I don't like fighting in play. It always hurts, and then I get cross, and want to hit as hard as I can. I say, though, we shall be hot in these leggings and gloves."

"Look here," cried Harry; "we haven't seen these before."

"What are they?"

"Gloves, of course, all stuffed and soft. Here, let's look at the book and see what it says about them."

The book of games was examined, but they found no mention of the wicket-keeper's gloves, but plenty of other information which was puzzling.

"It's all very well to call this thing a book of games," said Harry at last, "but there doesn't seem to be much fun in it. It's as puzzling as old Euclid with his circles and straight lines and angles. Here, let's put all the things away. I can't understand. We'll make the doctor show us; that's the easiest way."

And so it was time after time, nothing more being done, for it was decided that there should be no genuine commencement till the doctor was ready, and though he was reminded pretty well every day he always replied that he was not ready yet.

"But there is no occasion to waste time," he said one day. "You boys have the book, so you cannot do better than well study it up, rules and all. Then you will thoroughly know how to play cricket; all you will want is practice."

"We shall have to study up the book, Phra," said Harry, after parting from the doctor, "and I know it's going to be a hard job."

But never mind ; when you've got to take physic, it's best to swallow it down at once. Come along."

Phra nodded, set his teeth hard, and they went up to the palace through the hot sunshine, to enter its cool precincts and find Phra's room refreshing in its semi-darkness after the glare without, where Harry said it was hot enough to frizzle up the leaves into tea.

The book was brought, cricket turned to, and they sat down side by side with the book on the table.

"Let's begin at the beginning, and go steadily through it," proposed Phra.

"No, no ; we'll just skim it first."

"Very well. What's this—popping grease ? Why do they pop grease ?"

"'Tisn't ! It's popping crease. 'The popping crease must be four feet from the wicket, and exactly parallel with it.' Bother ! I shan't read any more of that. Parallel ! Why, it's geometry. Look at something else."

"The wickets must be pitched," read Phra.

"What for ? To keep off the wet, I suppose. No ! It means pitched into the ground, to make them stand up."

"But I say, what a lot there is to learn here, Hal. See what names they call the players by. Here's wicket-keeper."

"That's the one who attends to the gate, I suppose."

"Short slip."

"What's he got to do ?"

"I don't know.—Point."

"Oh, he's the man who keeps the stumps sharp."

"No ; he must be a good catcher," cried Phra, and he went on, "'Mid wicket—cover point—leg—long stop—long slip—long field off—long field on—changes of position—fielding.'"

"Bother ! Never mind about that," said Harry. "Look here ; let's read that bit, 'How to defend your wicket !' That ought to be interesting. 'The bifold task of the batsman.' "

Bang went the book, as Harry shut it up.

"What did you do that for ?" cried Phra, staring.

"Because it makes me feel so hot and stupid. I want to learn how to play, and that's all puzzles and problems, and what do I care when I go to play a game about parallels and bifolds ? It's too hot here to learn cricket from books. I say, what shall we do ?"

"Let's go to sleep," said Phra.

"Bah ! It's too lazy."

"I don't think so," said Phra. "Every one goes to sleep here in the middle of the day."

"No, they don't. I never do."

"Oh ! I've seen you more than once when it has been very hot."

"Well, it was an accident, then. It seems so stupid to go to sleep when it's light. Here, come along out again, and let's try and find old Sree."

"Who's to find him? Why, he may be miles away in the jungle."

"But I want him to arrange about going up a long way in a boat. Let's go up that little river again, and see how far we can get. Look here, I know what we'll do. We'll start as soon as it's light, and take plenty to eat with us, and have the next size larger boat out, with four men to paddle and four to rest, and then we can go right on."

"You'd have Sree?"

"Of course. He knows the way everywhere. He'd take us right up the little rivers that branch off—I mean, where no one goes. There's no knowing what we may find up there."

"No. Sree says there are plenty of wonders; I've often longed to go."

"Then we'll go now. We ought to have done so before. I should like to go for a week," said Harry.

"I don't think our people would like us to go for so long."

"Oh, I don't know. Let's try. I tell you what; let's have a bigger boat, so that we can sleep on board, and a man to cook for us. Then we can live comfortably for a few days. Why, we should get a wonderful lot of things for the museum."

"It would be very nice," said Phra thoughtfully.

"Nice? It would be grand. Here, I shall go home and speak to my father at once."

"Then I'll ask mine."

"He'll say yes, because he'll think he can trust us. I say, Phra, I wish we had thought of this before."

The boys separated, and Harry did not feel the heat as he hurried home to lay his plans before his father.

"For a week?" said Mr. Kenyon, with a look of doubt. "That's a long time, Hal."

"Not for getting a good lot of things, father. You know, whenever we've been up the river before, directly we have begun it has been time to come back."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon thoughtfully, "and if you were up the jungle river at daybreak you would have far better chances for getting scarce birds, and it would be a most interesting experience for you."

"Then you'll let me go, father?" cried the boy excitedly.

"I must talk the matter over with the King first."

"If he feels that you do not object, father, he is sure to say yes."

Mr. Kenyon was silent and thoughtful, looking so serious that Harry began to lose heart.

"What are you thinking, father?" he said at last.

"That it's a long time since I had a change."

"Yes, father?"

"That I have nothing particular to do."

"Father!"

"And that the doctor has been saying that he would like to make an expedition up the country."

"Then you think——"

"Yes, Hal, I do think that I should like for the doctor and me to join in your trip. It would only necessitate a larger boat."

"Oh," cried Harry excitedly, "that would be splendid."

"Better than you two alone?" said Mr. Kenyon quietly.

"A hundred times better, father. But think of that!"

"Think of what?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"Doctor Cameron putting us off day after day because he had not time to teach us cricket, when he can find time to go up the country."

Mr. Kenyon smiled.

"My dear boy," he said, "I do not wonder at his putting you off. Cricket is not a very attractive game at this time of year, in a country like this."

"Never mind the cricket," cried Harry. "Look here, father, will you go?"

"I am very much tempted to say yes."

"Say it then, father. I say, you'd take Mike, wouldn't you?"

"Certainly; he would be very useful."

"Here, I must go and tell Phra."

"There is no need; here he comes."

For the lad was crossing the garden, and as Harry met him with his face lit up with excitement, Phra's countenance was dark and dejected.

"It's all over, Hal," he said. "My father says it is out of the question for us to go alone."

"He said that?" cried Harry.

"Yes, and that if your father and Doctor Cameron were going too it would be different."

"They are going too, lad," cried Harry, slapping him on the shoulder.

"They—your father and Mr. Cameron?"

"Yes; isn't it splendid?"

"Here, I must go back at once," cried Phra, and, regardless of the heat, he set off at a trot.

Harry returned to the museum, where his father was seated.

"Where's Phra?" said the latter.

"Gone back to tell the King."

"To tell him what?"

"He said that it was out of the question for us two boys to go upon such an expedition alone."

"I expected as much."

"But if you and the doctor had been going, it would have been different."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, father. Poor old chap! he did look disappointed, till I told him that you two were going, and he has gone to tell the King."

"Tut—tut—tut!" muttered Mr. Kenyon. "What a rash, harem-scarem fellow you are! You shouldn't have taken all I said for granted, sir. Even if I fully make up my mind, we don't know that Doctor Cameron would be able to leave."

"But you said, father——"

"I said—you said—look here, sir, you are far too hasty. The doctor only said he thought he should go."

"That's enough, father," said Harry, laughing. "As soon as he hears that there is going to be such an expedition, do you think he will not manage to go with it?"

"Well, I must say I should be surprised if he did not come."

"So should I, father. I say, it will be capital. The King is sure to say yes now, and we can have the pick of his boats, and which men we like. I say, I wonder whether we can get a man who will find old Sree, because we ought to start to-morrow morning."

"Stuff! Rubbish!" cried Mr. Kenyon, laughing. "If we get off in a week, we shall do well. But I think I will go. I should be very glad of a change. So you may go and see the doctor and chat the matter over with him—not telling him that we are going, but that we are thinking of such a trip. You can then hear what he says about it."

"Go now, father?"

"If you like."

Harry did like, and was off at once, to find Mrs. Cameron under the tree, as he had seen her on that terrible day, but with the doctor seated back in another long cane-seated chair, fast asleep.

"Doctor not well?" said Harry, after the customary salute.

"Not at all well, Harry," said Mrs. Cameron, with a sigh. "He has been working too hard lately over his native patients, and he is quite done up. He must have a change."

"That's what I've come about," said Harry excitedly, and he told her what was proposed.

"I should not like losing him for a week, but I think it would do him a great deal of good."

"Quite set me up, dear," said the doctor, opening his eyes.

"Did you hear what I was saying, Doctor?" cried Harry wonderingly.

"Pretty well every word, my boy. It will be the very thing for me, for I am completely fagged. A long ride day after day up the river will be rest and refreshment. But I can't take you, my dear."

"I shall not mind, Duncan," said his wife. "Nothing could be better. Yes, you must go."

He sat up, and then sank back again, closing his eyes.

"It is of no use to fight against it, Mary," he said sadly. "I am doctor enough to thoroughly grasp all my symptoms. I really am overdone, and there is nothing for it but to try change—such a change as this. I wish it did not look like going for a thorough holiday and leaving you behind. It does not seem right."

"You will make me unhappy if you talk like this," cried Mrs. Cameron. "How can you think I should be so selfish as to mind your doing what is for your health?"

"It will do him good, Mrs. Cameron," said Harry, who was not enjoying the scene.

"Of course," she cried. "You may go back and tell Mr. Kenyon that the doctor will be delighted to make one of the party, for he wants a change badly."

"Look here, Harry; I don't think I ought to go," said the doctor.

"He ought, Harry, and he shall," cried his wife. "You take that message."

"Harry, lad, this is a horrible piece of tyranny. I am not very well, and my oppressor treats me like this. But there, it is of no use to protest, so I give in. I'll come."

Full of excitement, the boy hurried back to the bungalow to announce the result of his visit, his father hearing him silently to the end, and then looking so serious that Harry asked anxiously what it meant.

"This is very disappointing, my boy," said Mr. Kenyon. "After you had gone I began to be in hopes that the doctor would not go, and now he says he will."

"Yes, that he will, father."

"Then I suppose we shall have to go. I don't know, though: there is another chance, the King may refuse to sanction the journey, and of course you would not care to go without Phra."

"Well, no," said Harry, in a hesitating way; "it would not seem fair to go without him. Ah, here he is.—Well, what does he say?"

"That he thinks it will be a very interesting trip, and that he wishes he could leave all the cares and worries of his affairs and come with us.—My father says, Mr. Kenyon, that you are to choose whichever boat will be best for the journey, and select as many men as you think necessary, and store the boat with everything you want."

"Then this means going," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Of course, father. Shall we start to-morrow?"

"Can we be ready?"

"Can we be ready?" cried Harry scornfully. "What do you say, Phra?"

"Oh yes, we can be ready, only what about Sree?"

"I forgot old Sree!" cried Harry. "We must have him, and he's somewhere up the jungle."

"Yes," said his father, "we must have him with us; so I take it that we may make all our preparations, but do not start till Sree returns."

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOUSE-BOAT

THE disappointment caused by the absence of the old hunter was modified by the interest in the preparations. These filled the two lads with excitement, for a journey into unknown parts in such a land as Siam was full of the suggestions of wonders.

The first thing seen to was the choice of a boat, the requirements being that it should be light, strong, drawing very little water, and well provided for the accommodation of fourteen or sixteen people, with a fair amount of room, night and day. Then there would be boxes containing stores for a week, cooking apparatus, and cases for containing the specimens of all kinds that were to be saved.

But in a country like Siam, where house-boats are necessities of domestic daily life, there was little difficulty. One of the plainest of the King's light barges was found to answer all the requirements upon being provided with a few bamboo poles and an awning, so that the forward part of the boat could be sheltered at night and during storms, for the protection of the men. The central part was covered in, according to the regular custom, with a bamboo-supported roof, and matting curtains were so placed at the sides that the whole could be turned into a comfortable cabin at night, while the after-part had its matting cover that could be set up or removed at pleasure, this portion being intended for the after rowers and servants.

Boxes and chests were selected, filled, and placed on board. There were loops for the guns and spears to be taken, and lockers for the ammunition, and at last there seemed to be nothing more that could be done, for the crew were selected by Phra, who had his favourites among the King's servants, these including men who had never evinced any dislike to the English and were always eager to attend to the wishes of their young Prince.

The time had passed so rapidly that it was hard to believe two days had slipped away before everything could be declared to be in readiness. But on the second evening nothing more seemed needed, and it was felt that they might start at daylight the next morning.

For the crew was on board to protect the stores and other things ; even the stone, barrel-shaped filter fitted in a basket cover—a clumsy, awkward thing which the doctor declared to be absolutely necessary—was on board.

Harry had exclaimed against its being taken, and the doctor heard him.

“Look here, young fellow,” he said, “do you know what I am going up the river for ?”

“A holiday, of course,” replied Harry.

"Exactly. Then do you suppose I want my holiday spoiled by being called upon to attend people who are ill through drinking unwholesome water?"

"Of course not, sir; but would any one be ill?"

"Every one would," said the doctor angrily.

Harry thought this was a sweeping assertion, but he said nothing, and the filter was placed astern.

"I wish some one would knock it over," Harry whispered to Phra. "It would go to the bottom like a stone."

"Never mind the filter."

"I don't," said Harry; "but I do mind about old Sree. Oh, don't I wish I could have three wishes!"

"What would they be? What's the first?"

"I should have had that," said Harry. "Wishing to have three wishes."

"Well, then, what would the second be?"

"That the third might for certain be had," said Harry, laughing.

"What would the third be?"

"That old Sree would come here to-night."

"You've got your wish, then," cried Phra excitedly, "for here he comes."

"No! Nonsense!" cried Harry, who felt staggered and ready to turn superstitious.

"He is here, I tell you. Look, talking to that sentry by the gate."

"I say," said Harry, "isn't it rather queer?"

"It's rather good fortune," replied Phra.

"But after what we said."

Phra laughed.

"Why, you're not going to believe in old fables, are you?"

"No, of course not; but it did seem startling for him to turn up just as I had been wishing for him."

"Nonsense. Why, I have been wishing for him to come every hour for the last two days. Let's go and meet him. He's coming this way."

In another minute they had leaped ashore, run up the stone steps of the landing-place in front of the palace, and encountered Sree.

"Here, I say, where have you been?" cried Harry.

"I have been through the jungle and up towards the head of the little river, Sahibs, so as to find out whether it is worth your going up too."

"Well, is it?" cried Harry.

"Oh yes, well worthy," replied Sree. "No one ever goes there to hunt or shoot, and the birds are very tame and beautiful, and the river full of fish."

"Fish!" cried Harry excitedly. "There, I knew we had forgotten something, Phra. Fishing tackle."

"Yes, we must take some."

"I was coming to advise you to get a boat and go up there for two or three days to shoot, fish, and collect."

"Then you are too late, old Sree," cried Harry.

"Too late, Sahib?" said the man, whose countenance looked gloomy from disappointment.

"Yes; we're going for a week in that big boat."

"I am sorry, Sahib," said the man sadly. "I worked hard, and it took long to get through the jungle, and I had to sleep in trees. The Sahib's servant was not neglectful of his master. He is grieved that he is too late."

"Don't tease him, Hal; he doesn't like it. It hurts him. Never mind, Sree; we wanted you to help, but everything is ready now."

"I am glad, Sahib," said the man; "but I am sorry too, for I should have liked to go as hunter with the young Sahibs."

"Does that mean you can't go?" said Harry, laughing.

"Not unless the young Sahib will take his servant," said the man sadly.

"Why, of course we shall take you," cried Harry, "and we are as glad as glad that you have come. Here, let's go to the boat, Phra. I want Sree to see everything, so as to say whether we ought to take anything else."

The old hunter brightened up on the instant, and hurried with the boys to the boat, where for the next hour he was examining arrangements and suggesting fresh places for some of the articles, so that they might be stowed where they would be handier and yet more out of the way. He was able to suggest a few more things too, notably a stout net to hang by hooks from the roof of the cabin, ready to place specimens in to dry, or hold odds and ends for common use; more baskets, and a coil of rope, and a stout parang or two for cutting a way through creepers or cane-brakes.

At last, with a smile full of content, Sree announced himself as being satisfied, and having received permission from Phra, took possession of one corner at the back of the cabin, while Harry went to see the doctor respecting starting quite early the next morning, and then returned home.

CHAPTER XVII

JUNGLE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

THE heavy dew lay thick on leaf and strand, and the sky in the east was still grey, as the little party met at the landing-place, where the men were on the look-out and ready for the start; while when they pushed off and four oars sent the boat well up against the stream, past the house-boats clustered against the farther shore, nothing could have looked more peaceful and still.

The men eagerly worked at their oars in their peculiar Venetian, thrusting fashion, standing to their work; and it was a satisfaction

to see that, in spite of its size and load, the boat was wonderfully light, and rode over the water like a duck.

The calmness and peace of everything was most striking as it grew lighter ; and when the eastern sky began to glow, and the tips of the towers and spires of the different temples became gilded by the coming sun, both Mr. Kenyon and the doctor expressed their admiration, declaring the King's city to be after all, in spite of its lying in a flat plain, beautiful in the extreme.

Then the sun rose, shedding its glorious light around and giving everything a beauty it did not really possess. For sordid-looking boats, with nothing but a few mats hung from bamboo poles, looked as if they were made of refined gold ; while the trees which fringed the water, and hung their pendent boughs from the banks, shed a wondrous lustre, as if flashing gems from every dewy leaf.

The river too, in spite of its muddy waters, seemed more beautiful than ever, and the boys were revelling in the new delight of their journey up stream, when sundry preparations being made by Mike in the extreme after part of the boat changed the bent of Harry's thoughts to quite a different direction from that of admiring the beauty of the scene through which they were passing.

It was just as his father exclaimed,—

“Are you noticing how beautiful all this is, Hal ?”

“Oh yes, father, I've been looking at it ever so long. But when are we going to have breakfast ?”

The doctor burst into a hearty fit of laughter, in which Phra joined, and the boy seemed puzzled.

“What is it ?” he said, looking from one to the other. “Have I said something queer ?”

“Very, Hal,” said his father. “Getting hungry ?”

“I was—terribly,” replied Harry uneasily ; “but I don't feel so now. I don't like to be laughed at.”

“It will not hurt you, my boy. As to breakfast, you will have to wait an hour or so, till we turn out of the main stream. Then we must land at the first opening, and have a fire made ashore.”

Harry nodded, and wondered how he should get over the time.

There proved to be so much to take his attention, however, that he was ready to wonder when the boat was run in between two magnificent clumps of trees soon after they had turned off into the lesser river and entered the jungle by one of its water highways.

The men sprang out, and one made the prow fast by a rope, while others scattered, parang in hand, to collect and cut up dead or resinous wood, of which a heap was soon made and set alight, the air being so still that the blue smoke rose up quite straight, to filter, as it were, through the boughs overhead, the men feeding the flames carefully till a good mass of glowing embers was produced.

Over this sylvan fireplace Mike, with a cloth tied about his waist, apron fashion, presided, and in a very short time had prepared the coffee and taken it aboard.

There had been no preparations—no hunting for provisions, to add to the toothsomeness of the breakfast ; but eaten out there in the open boat, under the shade of the majestic trees, with the river gliding by, the strange cries from the jungle heard from time to time, and the attention of the lads constantly attracted to bird, insect, or reptile, they were ready to declare that they had never enjoyed such a breakfast before.

"How grand it would be to live always like this !" cried Harry.

"Beautiful," said the doctor ; "especially in the rainy seasons, when you could keep nothing dry and find no wood that would burn."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon ; "rain does damp one's enthusiasm."

"Oh, of course it would not be so pleasant then," said Harry ; "but generally it would be glorious, wouldn't it, Phra ? "

"I should get tired of it after a time, I think," was the reply.

"Pooh ! I shouldn't. Look how the men are enjoying it."

Harry nodded towards their people, who had all landed to take their meal on shore, leaving the boat free to their superiors, and certainly the party looked very happy, squatted round the fire, in spite of the heat ; while the smoke curled up in great wreaths in company with the suffocating carbonic acid gas evolved by the burning wood.

"Yes, they look happy enough, Hal," said the doctor. "They don't trouble themselves much about tablecloths or knives and forks."

In fact, the party formed quite a picture, one that it seemed a pity to disturb.

But it was disturbed, for at a word from Mike, Sree rose to dip some fresh, clear water to fill up the coffee-pot, and this done, Mike took a piece of half-burned bamboo, stirred the embers and parted them so as to make a steady place for the big coffee-pot, when there was a whirl of flame, sparks, and smoke rushing up among the boughs in a spiral, for the fire was now at its hottest.

There was no warning.

Sree had squatted down again, and Mike had seated himself, supporting himself upon one hand, leaving the other to snatch off the coffee-pot directly the brown froth began to rise with the boiling up, when *bang—rush—scatter !* Something fell suddenly from high up among the boughs overhead right into the fire, and as the men turned and rolled themselves away in every direction, they were bombarded as it were, by showers of red-hot embers and half-burned sticks, which were driven after them by the object which had fallen from the tree, and was now writhing, twining, and beating the burning wood and ashes till the fire was scattered over a surface some yards across.

The matter needed no explanation ; it was all plain enough. After the manner of such reptiles, a good-sized boa had tied itself up in a bundle of curves, knots, and loops on a convenient bough, after a liberal meal probably of monkey, and had been fast asleep

exactly over the spot where the fire was made. It had borne heat and smoke without moving until the last stir up of the embers delivered by Mike, but this had sent so stifling a flame that the sleeping serpent had been aroused, started into wakefulness, and in the heat and suffocation fallen into the flames, to writhe in agony, turning over and over in knotty convolutions, in one spot a yard or two square.

The doctor was the quickest to grasp the position. Rising from his seat, he took down one of the ready-charged guns, and waited for a few moments till from out of the writhing knot the reptile's tail rose quivering and thrashing the ashy ground. Directly after the head appeared, some feet above the folds, dimly seen through the smoke, as it was darted angrily in different directions, the jaws opening and the creature snapping at the horrible enemy which was causing it so much agony.

It was for this the doctor had been waiting, and as the head rose a little higher and was nearly motionless for a moment, both barrels flashed out their contents ; and as the concussion made the leaves overhead quiver violently, the serpent writhed and struggled frantically over and over in a knot that seemed to be always tying and untying itself, was hidden amongst the thick, reedy growth close to the river, splashed and swallowed a little in the shallow from which the reeds sprung, and then with a loud splash went clear of the growth into the dark, deep water overhung by the boughs of the trees.

Then there was an eddying and quivering where the stream glided along, and a few bubbles ascended to the surface, but though attentive watch was kept, no more was seen, the swift current having undoubtedly swept the reptile away.

"I had a good sight of its head when I fired," said the doctor. "Would you like to have snake for breakfast every morning when you lived out in the open, Harry ?"

"Ugh !" ejaculated the boys together.

"Well, I'm very glad we were having our breakfast on board," said Mr. Kenyon, laughing. "Here, Michael, you need not stand staring up into the tree ; there are no more snakes up there."

"Wouldn't its mate be there, sir ?" said the man.

"Oh no, it isn't likely. Where is the coffee-pot ?"

"Don't know, sir ; but I don't want any more breakfast, thank you."

"Nonsense, man," said his master ; "find the coffee-pot, and the men will rake the fire together again. There is nothing to mind now."

Mike looked anything but satisfied, going about his task unwillingly ; but the men came back from where they had scattered, laughing with one another now that the scare was at an end.

"He's making a poor beginning," said Harry, on seeing their man go peering about slowly in different directions amongst the tall grass and bushes.

"Mike doesn't like snakes," replied Phra, laughing.

"Well, who does?" cried Harry. "I hate them; and it was enough to scare anybody. I know I should have jumped away fast enough. I say, look there."

"What at?"

"There's the pot, in amongst those young bamboos. No, no; there, half in the water.—Found it?"

"No, sir. It's gone," replied the man.

"Nonsense; here it is. You didn't look in the right place."

Mike came towards them, looking very sour and disgusted, as he picked up the tin vessel.

"Reg'lar spoiled," he said, examining the pot and holding it out to show that there was a big dent on one side. "Won't hold water now."

"How do you know till you try? Dip it in and see."

The pot was dipped, filled, and proved to be quite sound in spite of the hollow in its side, a fact which disappointed Mike, who prepared to make some fresh coffee by getting into the boat again, while the men laughingly collected the scattered brands and restarted the fire.

"I say, Mike," said Harry, as the man came back, "you shouldn't make a fuss about a little thing like this; it's nothing to what you will have to put up with."

Mike looked at him aghast, his face screwed up into such an aspect of dismay that the boys burst out laughing.

"Ah, it's all very well to laugh, Master Harry," grumbled the man; "but if there's going to be any more of this sort of thing, I know——"

"Know what?"

"I'm going back home."

"How?" said Harry, laughing.

"Don't ask stupid questions," said Phra, with a perfectly serious face. "He's either going to swim back with the stream, among the crocodiles, or to walk through the jungle. There are not so very many tigers there now."

"What!" gasped Mike.

"Make haste, Michael, my lad," said Mr. Kenyon. "Get the fresh coffee made and the men's breakfast over; we want to go on."

"Yes, sir; of course, sir—oh dear, oh dear!—Ah, it's all very well to laugh, Master Harry."

"Laugh! Well, it's enough to make any one laugh to see you make such a fuss over a baby snake. Wait till we come to the hundred foot long ones."

Mike gave him another look, and then hurried back to the blazing fire.

"You've spoiled his breakfast," said Phra.

"Serve him right for being a great coward. I want him to get used to such things."

Phra laughed.

"Who's to get used to such things as that? I say, look; there's one of our old friends watching us."

He pointed up to where a little grey-whiskered monkey was holding back the leaves, so as to peer wonderingly down at the party.

"I believe one could soon coax these monkeys down to be fed."

"If you put a few bananas on the top of the cabin there, they wouldn't want any coaxing; they'd come and take them."

"Yes, when we were not looking; but I mean, coax them into being tame enough to feed from one's hand."

"Might perhaps, but they're treacherous. They like to spring on any one's shoulders to bite the back of the neck. Look, look! parrots!"

A little flock of brightly coloured, long-tailed lories flew over the river, but before a gun could be seized they had disappeared.

"Not very good ones," said Harry. "Only green."

"And sour," said the doctor.

"Sour?" cried Harry wonderingly.

"Yes, sour grapes, Hal. Why, they were lovely specimens, my boy. Look at those butterflies flitting about the flowers growing there in wreaths. Now, if this were a hard road we might get a few of them."

"We could get one of those sun-birds," said Harry, pointing to some half-dozen fluttering about the cluster of flowers dependent from a bough overhanging the stream.

"Yes, but we must wait till we have got some dry sand to use instead of shot. Mind we scrape some up from the first shallow place we reach."

The fact of the boat being motionless there by the side of the river, and all on board sitting quietly watching the abundant beautiful objects around, made the various inhabitants of the jungle on either side come out of their hiding-places and take no further heed of their presence; consequently until the men had finished their breakfast there was ample opportunity for a quiet, observant natural history study, and Mr. Kenyon remarked,—

"It is, after all, better to be content with watching nature in a place like this than shooting specimens and preserving them in a miserable imitation of the natural shape. For how poor and pitiful they are at the best."

"That's true enough," said the doctor, smiling; "but you would not make a museum of our memories."

"Why not?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"Because memory is weak, and our description of what we have seen to other people who could never by any possibility see the beautiful creatures we have encountered, would come very far short. I think that the sight of the poorest skin that we have preserved would make ten times the impression on another's mind than a month's talking could."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon, "and nature is so abundant."

By this time the men had resumed their oars, and the boat was gliding rapidly up the river, the boys being ready to point out where they had shot the birds they had taken back, and seen the monkey which had watched them on their way.

So far they had met no crocodiles, but as they went higher it seemed as if, though they kept themselves out of sight, several were in the narrow river and were retiring before them, till the water growing more shallow they began to show from time to time.

The boys seized their guns upon catching sight of the two prominences which contained the reptile's eyes appearing above the surface some thirty yards ahead, but Mr. Kenyon checked them.

"Don't shoot," he said, "it is of no use to kill a few among so many."

"But suppose they attack us," said Harry.

"They will not unless driven to bay. Steer in closer to the side, Sree," continued Mr. Kenyon, "so as to give them room to retreat down the river."

The order was obeyed, the boat being kept to the left, so close in that the oars touched the tips of the hanging boughs, with the consequence that every now and then there was a loud splashing and wallowing in the water close beneath the bank, the part hidden by the pendent boughs.

"Why, they swarm under there," said the doctor.

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon, "and this shows how little the shooting of one or two has to do with thinning them down. By the way, boys, where was it that you had your adventure with the big crocodile and the monkey?"

Phra rose and pointed forward.

"A little farther there, on the right," he said, "where those bigger trees are hanging over the water."

The whole scene came vividly back to the pair as the boat glided on, and after a glance upward at the trees, Harry's eyes fell to scanning the water, half expecting to see the ugly muzzle of one of the great crocodiles shoot out.

This he did not see, but first one and then another made a tremendous eddy in the stream, their lurking-places being churned up by the men's oars.

"The brutes are extremely thick up here," said the doctor: "a pretty good warning that we must not attempt any bathing."

"They seem to swarm," replied Mr. Kenyon. "It is a pity they are of no use; but perhaps some day one will be found for them,—possibly their skins may be utilised."

"Skins of young ones, perhaps. These big fellows would be too horny."

As he spoke, a huge reptile rushed from a mud bank into the river with a tremendous splash, sending a wave along the surface, which made the boat rise and fall.

This time guns were seized by the boys' elders, upon the strength of the possibility of an attack ; but the huge creature must have sunk at once to the bottom, for no further sign appeared.

Meantime the great, green bank of trees on either side seemed to grow more beautiful from the brilliancy of the flowers with which some of the trees were covered ; while, wherever a flock of parroquets flew out, it was pretty well always a sign of fruit.

Here, too, at intervals, where there were breaks in the banks of the great timber trees, huge tufts of bamboo shot up spear-like, and showed their delicate foliage, looking at a distance so light and feathery that often enough the straight stems, which rose in places as much as sixty feet, seemed as if surrounded by a delicate haze.

It was now decided that due attention should be given to collecting and providing for the meals of so large a party ; and as nothing in the shape of deer or pig had been seen, and mid-day was long passed, it was suggested that, as soon as a suitable spot was reached, the boat should be moored to some overhanging bough and the boys should try their fortune at fishing.

As soon as Sree heard this he busied himself with the basket which contained the lines, and kept a look-out for a likely pitch.

Suddenly there was a rushing of wings, and a big bird appeared —a signal for two guns to be raised, but only to be laid down again.

"Ugh ! vulture," said Harry in disgust.

"Pity not to have shot it," said Phra ; "it would have done to cut up for bait."

Harry's lip curled up and his nostrils dilated.

"Do you know we mean to eat the fish we catch ?"

"Oh, of course," said Phra hurriedly ; "I hadn't thought of that. But would it make any difference, Doctor Cameron ?" he added.

The doctor laughed.

"No," he said, "I don't think we should have found the fish any the worse for it. All the same, though, I should prefer my fish not to have been fed upon the flesh of an unclean bird."

"Exactly so," said Harry's father ; "but perhaps it is just as well that we should not study the food of the fish we eat. They are not very particular as to their diet.—What about that quiet, still eddy yonder, Sree ?"

"Where the great tree-trunk lies in the water ?" said the doctor. "No, that won't do. There must be scores of half-rotten boughs among which the fish would run and tangle up the lines."

"It would be an excellent place, Sahib," said Sree humbly. "We could tie up the boat there, and fish below it, where the stream runs in."

"To be sure," said Mr. Kenyon ; "I had not noticed that little rivulet. You are wrong, Doctor ; it will be a capital place."

"Perhaps," said the gentleman addressed, "but I don't like the look of it. I feel pretty sure that we shall find a great crocodile has his lurking-place under that large tree-trunk."

"Yes, Sahib ; there is one there," said Sree ; "but he will go as soon as he sees the boat."

He spoke to the man in the bows to be ready to make the line fast to one of the dead boughs, which stuck up dry and swept clear of bark, showing, like its fellows, how high the flood water had raised the level of the river, for above a certain height the bark was still clinging to the branches.

It proved to be just as the old hunter had said, for as the boat was forced up to the great trunk lying in the water, there was a sudden rush, the surface was turned into a series of eddies, and a wave rolled along towards the other side of the river, indicating the direction in which the reptile disturbed had gone.

All the same the boat was made fast, and floated down stream to the full length of the rope, the men's oars were laid in, and those astern joined their companions forward, to squat together talking in a low tone and chewing betel, while Mr. Kenyon and the doctor settled themselves comfortably in the open cabin.

"Won't you fish, father ?" asked Harry.

"No, my boy," he replied ; "you shall fish for me."

"But you will fish, Doctor Cameron ?" said Phra politely.

"No, I would rather see you," replied the doctor, and he started and caught up his gun, but laid it down once more, for the birds which had caught his eye were only crows, some half-dozen of which came up stream as if they had followed the boat, and now they had found it, settled down in one of the highest trees apparently to have a quiet chat about its object in coming up there.

Sree had been busy the while, preparing bait for the lines, which were to be used ledger fashion without rods.

Sree's bait was some very stiff paste, which he was working up out of a couple of handfuls of flour ; and he made haste to explain that if the fish did not take this well, he should soon change the lure.

"But we must catch one first."

The lines were strong and the hooks tied on gimp, such as would have been used for pike-fishing at home, for the fish of the Siamese rivers had not been tried for till they were as shy as ours at home, and before many minutes had elapsed the boys each had his baited hook thrown out from the opposite side of the boat six or eight yards away, the leads sinking some six feet in the fairly clear water, and with fingers just feeling the pierced lead, they waited.

It was not the first by many times that the boys had fished together in the river, and they pretty well knew what they were likely to catch ; but they were not prepared to sit beneath the hot sunshine for so long without a sign of there being fish about.

"Come, be sharp," cried the doctor banteringly. "I thought we were going to have a good fry for dinner. How soon shall I send the men ashore to make a fire ?"

"Fishermen always have patience," said Harry.

"But people who want their dinner do not," said Mr. Kenyon, laughing.

"I say, Sree," whispered Harry, "they will not bite at paste."

"Pull up your line, Sahib," said the hunter.

Harry did as he was told, and Sree smiled.

"Something has eaten the bait," he said. "Didn't you feel a pull?"

"No, not the slightest."

The hook was rebaited and sent down stream again, and Phra's hook proving to be in the same unattractive state, received the same treatment; but for fully half an hour nothing was done but rebaiting and throwing in.

"We had better make a move," said Mr. Kenyon. "It is very beautiful here, but the crocodiles seem to have scared the fish away. Let's go half a mile higher."

"No, no, not yet, father," said Harry. "It seems such a capital place, and—I've got him!"

For as he spoke he felt a slight twitch at the line he held, and then all was still for a few moments. Next there was a steady draw, and the line began to pass through his fingers, while upon checking it the drag became a heavy one, and he found that he was fast in a good fish.

It was evident that a shoal had come up towards the boat, for hardly had Harry begun to haul upon his line before Phra felt the premonitory twitch, and directly after the draw upon his line.

"Now, father, had we better go higher?" cried Harry. "Oh, my word! it is a big one; the line regularly cuts my hands."

There was nothing to see but the lines cutting the water in different directions, for it was evident that the baits had been seized by bottom-loving fish, which went on fighting to keep down as low as they could.

By this time Sree had taken up a short bamboo to which a large hook was firmly bound, and bidding Harry now draw hard, he stood ready, while the lad raised the heavy, struggling fish to the surface, and, in spite of its efforts, brought it close up to the side of the boat, when with one well-aimed stroke the old hunter thrust the hook beneath it and lifted it over the side.

The next moment, leaving the fish flapping and beating the bamboo bottom, Sree stepped beside Phra, where the same business was gone through, and the second fish dragged in.

They proved to be very similar in appearance to a fish but little known in England, though lingering still in some few sluggish rivers—the burbot—a fish that is best described as being something like a short, thick eel. These were together over twenty pounds in weight, and welcome from their delicate quality as food.

"Enough is as good as a feast," said Mr. Kenyon, smiling; and the order being given, the boat was once more sent gliding up stream, look-out being kept for a suitable place for landing and making a fire.

This was reached at last, and the fish, spitted on the ever-present, ever-useful bamboo, set down to roast, so that they might make a welcome addition to the next *al fresco* meal.

After another few miles a suitable mooring-place was found beneath an enormous tree, and a fire once more lit; this was to act as a scare to keep away noxious creatures, but, as Harry said, for some things they might have been better without.

For they soon found that the glare of the burning wood woke up and attracted the birds, which came circling round it in a strangely weird way, their dimly seen forms coming and going out of the darkness into the dome of light ribbed with the branches of the trees.

Moths and flies innumerable buzzed about through the glare, and, worst of all, the light and heat attracted the smaller reptiles, snakes and lizards creeping towards the flame for the sake of the warmth of what must have seemed to them like a new, strange sun, and many of them getting burned.

"It's very horrid, father," said Harry. "Mike says that he saw hundreds of wriggling snakes and lizards creeping up when he helped the men make up the fire as you advised, for they would have set the forest ablaze if it had been done their way."

"Hundreds, eh?" said Mr. Kenyon. "Then I suppose we may set it down as being about a dozen, Hal?"

"He is an awful fibster, father," said Harry, laughing.

"I don't think the man really means to lie wilfully," said Mr. Kenyon; "but his imagination and his tongue run wild."

"Perhaps it's his eyes," said the doctor, smiling; "a natural failing. The lenses are too round, and they magnify."

"Let's be charitable, and set it down as that," said Mr. Kenyon; "but it does not matter to us. It is not as if we were going to sleep ashore, and this is a novel experience."

"Novel, indeed. What a collection of moths and beetles we might make now!"

"Awkward work," replied Mr. Kenyon. "I think we might be content with enjoying the strange scene."

Both being tired with the day's exertions, the boys thought so too, and for long enough they watched the illuminated trees of the jungle, which were always changing their aspect as the fire rose and fell, emitting flashes of light, and sending up myriads of sparks or wreaths of smoke to form clouds overhead, which reflected back the light and turned the water into gold, while strange, dark shadows seemed to dance and waltz among the great trunks.

It was all so wild and beautiful that even after the men had finally replenished the fire and settled themselves down for the night under their matting shelter, spread over the fore part of the boat, no one aft felt the slightest desire to lie down and sleep.

"I couldn't sleep, could you?" said Harry, in a low tone, to Phra, as they sat in the half-closed-in cabin, now watching the

surroundings of the fire, now, attracted by some sound, turning to look up or down the river.

"Sleep? No," replied Phra; "it all seems so strange and different. We've heard all these noises of a night when we've been at home, but they were far off."

"And now one is right amongst them," said Harry. "I say, are you sure your gun's loaded?"

"Yes, quite; I looked at it just now."

"So did I at mine. I don't think I'm at all afraid; are you?"

"I don't think so; but after what we saw this morning I can't help fancying that there might be a great snake somewhere in the boughs overhead, coming down lower and lower till it thrust in its head here. I say, fancy it taking one of us out and up into the tree."

"Shan't," said Harry. "I don't believe there are any in the jungle big enough to do such a thing."

"Oh, there are some monsters," said Phra quietly.

"Yes, so people like our Mike say. He told me once that some of your father's men said they had seen a croc fifty feet long. Hark at that!"

The sound was startling, and it came from off the water lower down the river.

"It's your fifty feet crocodile slapping the water with his tail to stun the fish," said Phra grimly.

"I don't know about fifty, but it sounds as if the great wretch might be thirty feet long. Ugh! What's to prevent a monster coming up close to the boat and helping himself to one of us? I couldn't go to sleep for thinking such a thing possible."

"I don't think there's any fear of such a thing happening. You never heard of anything of the kind among the thousands of boats down the river and canals."

"No, but one can't help thinking of such creepy notions. We never thought of them before we came."

"Are you boys going to sleep?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"Yes, father, directly," said Harry; "I mean, going to try."

"Off with you, then, so as to be ready for a good day's work to-morrow. Did you see how beautiful the fire-flies are, right away up and down the river?"

"Yes, sir," said Phra. "I've been watching them; it looks sometimes as if the bushes and boughs were full of flying stars. Hear that?"

"Yes; a tiger," said Mr. Kenyon quietly. "Hear the king of stripes, Doctor?"

The gentleman addressed grunted, and then breathed hard.

"The brute does not trouble him," said Mr. Kenyon; "and it need not trouble us."

"No fear of its swimming out to the boat?" said Phra.

"Not the slightest," replied Mr. Kenyon. "Let down that mat to screen you from the night air and mists, and go to sleep."

"Let the mat down?" said Harry, in a tone full of protest; "but if we do we can't see the fire-flies."

"Take another look, and then let it down and go to sleep."

"But we don't feel as if we could go, father."

"Of course not, if you sit up talking. There, let down the matting, for our sake as well as yours. Good-night, my boys."

"Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, father," said Harry, as he let fall the mat, and thus completely closed in the cabin-like place.—"But there's no sleep for us, Phra, I'm afraid."

"Let's try," said Phra.

"Oh, I'll try," replied Harry.

It needed no trying, for in five minutes there was no one awake in the boat, though there were wild cries far away in the jungle, strange splashings, coughings and barkings from the river, and every now and then loud cracklings and sputterings from the fire, whose rays gleamed in through the matting hung round.

But though every one slept, there was an advance about to be made upon the occupants of the boat, some forty or fifty fierce creatures making their way in through the matting to attack first one and then the other, the attack going on till the savage enemies were satiated with blood, their victims being all the while deeply plunged in sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII ELEPHANTS AT HOME

"EH? What? Nonsense!"

"That's what I said, Master Harry. It's 'most a thousand times darker than when we lay down. I mean, it would be if old Sree hadn't raked the fire together and put on some more wood. He said it was time to get up, and I had to get up; but I feel horrid bad. I hope we're all alive."

"Did Sree say it was to-morrow morning, Mike?"

"Yes, sir; but I don't believe it."

"Here, Phra, wake up. Do you hear? Mike says it's to-morrow morning."

"No, sir; no, sir," protested the man, who could be dimly seen leaning over the boys by the faint rays of the fire ashore still streaming in. "I wouldn't have said such a thing these next two hours."

"Very well," said Harry irritably; "Sree said so, and he's sure to know. Do you hear, Phra? Wake up."

Phra made use of a word he had learned of his companion.

"Bother!" And then, "Do be quiet!"

"Shan't. Wake up, or I'll scoop in some water over you."

"You do if you dare," growled Phra viciously.

"Oh, I dare," said Harry, whose sleepy irritability was going off and making way for the spirit of mischief in him; "but I don't

want to make everything wet. Get up, you miserable old Siamese prince ! You're not going to sleep if I'm not."

"Bother !" cried Phra sharply, in response to a shake.

"Wake up, then ! Here, Phra, we're all alive oh ! and nothing has touched us all through the night."

"Oh !"

"What's the matter, Mike ?" said Harry, whose attention was turned from the young Prince to their man.

"I'm so bad, sir. I've caught the jungle fever with sleeping in this damp place."

"Nonsense !"

"Oh, I have, sir, and I feel dreadful bad. I never was so ill before in my life."

"I don't believe it, but I'll wake Doctor Cameron. I daresay he brought some quinine with him."

"What ! that horrid, bitter stuff, sir ? No, no ; don't, please."

"Bah ! Making a fuss about some physic. But you must have it. We're not going to have our trip spoiled by your turning ill. I say, Doctor !"

"No, no, Master Harry ; don't say anything, please," whispered the man. "Not till after breakfast. I couldn't eat a morsel if I had to take that horrid, bitter quinny."

"Oh, you must be bad !" said Harry, with mock sympathy. "Here, I know a little. How do you feel ?—pain in your back ?"

"A little, sir, where it rested against a big bamboo in the night."

"That sounds bad," said Harry.

"Does it, sir ? Oh dear !"

"What else ? Headache ?"

"No, sir ; but I've got it, and I can feel my face all covered with spots."

"It's the mosquitoes," cried Phra, sitting up suddenly.

"Hullo ! You awake ?—That's it, Mikey."

"Oh no, sir," groaned the man ; "it's worse than that."

"Tisn't. His Royal Highness Prince Phra Mala Krom Praya says it's mosquitoes, and he's right. How many spots have you got on your face ? A million ?"

"Well, no, sir, I don't think there's as many as that ; but my face is full, and they itch and sting horrid, and my eyes are swelled up and stiff. Just you feel."

"No, thankye, Mike ; but I'll have a look as soon as it is light. I say, though, I wonder you haven't got a million bites.—There, don't be such a baby. Go and get the breakfast ready. I'll wake the others."

"He ain't a bit o' feeling in him," sighed Mike to himself ; and he went out of the cabin.

"What does it look like, Phra ?" said Harry, for his companion had passed his head out beside the matting.

"Come and see ; it's lovely."

Harry thrust his head out on the other side of the mat, to gaze up and down the river, to see overhead the stars growing pale and feeble, while the river bed was filled up by a soft, dark-grey flood which rose about ten or fifteen feet up the black wall of trees opposite to them. On the other side and overhead there was a warm glow which lit up the thin mist, giving it a roseate hue, while the cloud of smoke was gathering more and more and blotting out the faint stars half across the river, its under side ruddy too with the fire-reflected light.

"I never saw the river look like this before," cried Harry. "Looks jolly, doesn't it?"

"Beautiful and calm, and just as if the earth was waking up," replied Phra.

"Birds, you mean," said Harry. "Parrots are whistling, and —here, I say, hark at that *coo—ah—coo—ah*. Hear that?"

"Yes. Argus pheasant," said Phra eagerly.

"Let's take the guns and go and see if we can't get a shot at it."

"What! try and get through the jungle now it's all dripping with dew?"

"Never thought of that," said Harry. "Would be sloppy, wouldn't it?"

"Sloppy! Why, we should be drenched before we'd gone ten yards."

"And I don't suppose we could go ten yards. Let's go and ask old Sree if he can call the birds over, so that we can get a shot at them."

They stepped carefully out into the forward part of the boat, and then Harry thrust back his head to carry out his promise.

"Father! Doctor!" he cried. "Morning."

"Yes; thank you," said Mr. Kenyon, and the doctor grunted.

Phra had by this time reached the mooring rope and begun drawing the boat's prow close up to the prostrate tree-trunk to which it was moored, for prostrate trees were plentiful along the banks, and in one place two falling nearly opposite from either bank of the stream had almost formed a barricade to stop the way.

"Be careful, Sahibs," said a voice out of the gloom, the old hunter having left the group of rowers gathered round the fire. "The tree-trunk is slippery with the dew."

"Oh, it's you, Sree," said Harry. "Isn't that the *coo—ah* calling?"

"Yes, Sahib; I have heard it many times."

"Could we get near and manage a shot at it?"

"No, Sahib; it would hear us before we were half way, and be silent. Then we should not know which way to go. Besides, you would find the grass and trees too wet."

"Would it come if you called to it?"

"No, Sahib, not unless we were in a deep, dark part of the jungle."

"Oh well, never mind," said Harry. "It wouldn't be pleasant

before breakfast. Here, let's go ashore now we're so near, Phra. Anything burned in the fire last night?"

"Yes, Sahib; I've found four dead birds under the trees, and some lizards and snakes that had been too close. Some of them were only half dead. They had scorched themselves and then crawled away."

The boys went up to the blazing fire, to find Mike busy cooking the men's breakfast, the latter making way for the lads to come close up to the pleasant glow, which dissipated the chilly mist floating around.

As they went round the fire Sree pointed out the remains of several reptiles, one of which was still moving and writhing slightly.

This—part of a long, thin snake—Sree stooped to twitch into the hottest part of the glowing fire.

"Oh, I say, Sree, how horrid!" said Harry.

"No, sir; better dead than living in such pain. It could never get well. This one might," he added, dragging another from among the low growth close by, with the result that it came to and bit at a bamboo staff the man held.

"It's poisonous," cried Phra. "Mind!"

"Yes, Sahib; I'll take care," said Sree. "It is a good deal scorched, but it might live and do mischief. It is a very bad kind, almost as poisonous as the naga."

As he spoke he gave his bamboo staff a whirl round his head, which threw the writhing reptile into a knot at the end, and then giving a final jerk the dangerous creature was dashed into the middle of the fire, where a loud sputtering, crackling, and hissing bespoke its fate.

"Was that it hissing in agony?" said Harry, with a look of disgust.

"Oh no, Sahib," said the old hunter, smiling. "It is only the flesh. The heat in there killed the snake directly. Look! there is a dead bird; that will make the same noise. Throw it in."

"Why, it's one of those beautiful rosy pigeons," said Harry, "only half its feathers are burnt off. It's dead enough. I say, though, it's a pity to waste that. I'll make Mike cook it for breakfast. What's that bird?"

"A crow," said Phra, turning the object over with his foot; and then, before Harry could seize it, tossing it into the fire himself, for a precisely similar hissing to arise.

"I'm glad of that," said Harry; "it seems so horrible to burn anything alive. Here, Mike, how soon will our breakfast be ready?"

"As soon as I can go on board to get it, sir. The gentlemen are not up yet."

"Not up!" said Harry. "Why, you talk as if they slept in bedrooms—Look! there they are."

For as he spoke the matting was drawn aside, just as the light was coming fast, the faint rays of the sun striking horizontally through the soft, grey mist, and lighting it up like a cloud at sunset.

The effect was wonderful, for with the first rising of the sun there was a light breeze which lifted the mist, making it rise and float away in wreaths across the tops of the jungle trees, the coming of bright day once more bringing forth a wild chorus of shrieks, pipings, and strange cries from the hidden birds.

Mike quickly had a good meal spread, and as soon as the fire was no longer necessary, the men under Sree's direction threw a few jars of water over it, and then took to their oars, the breakfast in the open cabin being finished as the party glided up the beautiful stream.

They were now well beyond the parts ever reached by the most venturesome of the boating men of the town and villages around, and in consequence the various birds and quadrupeds displayed but little shyness, the former fluttering near the boat, or perching in little flocks to watch the visitors to this wild region, while the monkeys grew more and more venturesome, ceasing to depute the observations to the old greybeard of the troop, and crowding on the branches, to chatter and stare down, probably seeing human beings for the first time in their lives.

"They don't seem to think much of us, Phra," said Harry, who was lying back so that he could look up in comfort at the comical little creatures.

"Well, it's quite fair," said Phra ; "we don't think much of them. I don't know, though ; I envy their strength. Look how easily they make those jumps."

"Yes, it would puzzle us. But isn't it ridiculous that they should be so careless, jumping from tree to tree just over the water, where they ought to know that the crocodiles are waiting for them ? I daresay we shall see one come down with a splash directly."

Harry was quite right : five minutes had not passed before, in the midst of a loud chattering, a low, heavily laden bough snapped, and about a dozen of the little fellows fell scrambling down ; but all saved themselves by catching at branches before reaching the water, save one, who went in with a loud splash, but caught at some twigs and leaves which dipped in the surface, and cleverly dragged itself out, to begin scrambling up again amidst a chorus of loud cries, just as the long muzzle of a crocodile was thrust out and snatched back again as rapidly, after receiving full in the side of the head the contents of the doctor's gun.

"Brute !" he exclaimed. "What a beautiful place this would be if it were not infested with these savage wretches !—Killed, Sree ? "

"No, Sahib ; I think not. I can see him swimming yonder. The water is clear here."

They had another glimpse at the injured reptile, which shot up about fifty yards ahead, beat the water for a few moments, and then disappeared beneath the tangle.

No more shooting was done, the voyagers contenting themselves with observing, and finding abundance to take their attention, for

at every few yards some curious-looking water-fowl or wader rose from the river side. Then it would be a lovely blue kingfisher or solemn-looking crimson-breasted trogon, while at times a glimpse was obtained of some animal coming down to drink, only to be startled away by the passing boat.

Once it was a strange-looking animal with trunk-like snout, which stared for a moment before wrenching itself round, giving just a momentary view of its piebald body, and then rushed through the undergrowth.

"We're favoured," cried the doctor. "That was a specimen one ought to have shot."

"What for?" said Mr. Kenyon. "It would have been too big and clumsy to preserve. If you shoot, let it be something for the table."

The doctor took note of this, and he and the lads finding good opportunities, brought down several large water-fowl, which were plucked by the men not rowing for the evening meal, it having been decided that while on the trip up the river two good meals would be sufficient for each day.

Twice over Phra's sharp eyes detected large serpents in the overhanging boughs, their presence being doubtless explicable by the numbers of monkeys travelling to and fro along the edges of the jungle where it was cut by the river.

On the second occasion the doctor's gun was raised for a shot, but a sign from the old hunter stopped him.

"What is it?" he said, for Sree was pointing forward.

"Elephants, Sahib," whispered the man; and then bidding the men to row gently, so as not to make a sound, the boat glided on towards what in the distance looked like the blunt end of the river, so completely did it seem cut off by the sudden way in which it doubled back upon itself, growing wider and shallower at the same time, while from some peculiarity of soil the trees had retired farther from the bank, leaving quite a wide, park-like stretch, through which the stream meandered.

But the party in the boat had no eyes for the scenery; their attention was taken up fully, as they turned the bend of the river, by the sight of some ten or a dozen elephants of all sizes indulging in a bath in the now shallow water, wading, wallowing, or squirting it over their backs.

It was evidently such a sanctuary that the great animals felt no fear of being disturbed, and the boat and its occupants remained unnoticed, Sree having signed to the men to run it close in under the shore on the right. Here, through the doubling back of the river, they were not above a couple of hundred yards across the intervening jungle from where they had come up and the old hunter had first heard the noise made by the herd.

They sat for some time watching the actions of the strange, unwieldy-looking creatures, and would have been content to remain longer had not the largest of the animals, after syringeing himself

to his heart's content, trumpeted loudly and begun to wade out of the river, taking a course which, if continued, would have brought him to the shore close to the boat.

Wild elephants can be very dangerous if roused ; but here there was nothing to fear, for the men could with a few strokes have put the boat into deep water where an elephant was not likely to follow ; so in obedience to Mr. Kenyon's order, the rowers rested on their oars and the elephant came on, nearer and nearer, his great head nodding and bowing from side to side, and his eyes fixed upon the surface, till suddenly taking the scent of the travellers, borne by the light air, he stopped short, caught sight of them as he raised his head, and stood as if turned to stone, staring at them for some seconds, before uttering a strange cry of alarm and dashing back, with ears flapping and extended trunk, towards his companions.

The first cry of alarm was sufficient, every elephant churning up the water in the endeavour to be first on the farther shore.

The party watched till the last beast had disappeared, the first making straight for the jungle and plunging right in through a hole it made apparently in the great wall of greenery, the others following in single line after it, and, according to custom using its footprints, till the biggest, who appeared to be as massive as old Sul, passed through, and the elastic stems and vines seemed to spring back in their places.

"Why, Phra," said Harry, "I did not know that we had wild elephants so near. Did you know, Sree ?"

"Yes, Sahib ; I have seen that herd many times, and could lead the King's elephant-catchers to their hiding-place if they were wanted ; but they have not been wanted yet."

"It is a curious country," said Mr. Kenyon ; "we seem to know nothing of it a few miles from any of the rivers."

The open part they were in looked so bright and attractive that, regardless of the near neighbourhood of the elephants, it was decided merely to go to the upper end of the shallows where the jungle closed in again, and where a sufficiently umbrageous tree could be found projecting over the river to add to their shelter, and then camp for the night.

Here a fire was once more lit, and while the preparations for the evening meal went on, the doctor and the two boys took their guns for a stroll back along the open stretch of grass they had passed.

"Don't be long," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Which means, don't go too far," replied the doctor. "We shall not. It is only to stretch our legs a bit, for the boat is rather cramping."

The intention was good and wise, but the object intended soon proved to be almost an impossibility. The stretch of open land between the river and the jungle looked at a distance much like a fair meadow, and it struck Harry from that point of view.

"Just the place for our cricket," he said to Phra, as, shouldering their guns, they stepped off after the doctor.

"Mind how you come," said the latter, who was brought to a standstill. "The water has been all over here, and the place is full of cracks and holes. Try back a little your way."

"Looks quite right here, sir," cried Harry. "It's as solid as— Oh— Hi ! Phra, catch hold of my gun."

The boy laid his own piece down, caught at the barrel of Harry's, and pulling hard, his companion, who had sunk up to his knees and was steadily going lower, was able to struggle back.

"Oh, here's a mess !" he panted, stamping to get rid of the mud.

"You didn't choose the right direction, Hal," said the doctor, laughing.

"No, sir," said Harry meekly. "Will you go first ?"

"Yes, I think I can do better than that, my lad. Let's strike right across here towards where the elephants went out of sight. The ground must be firmer there."

The boys prepared to follow, as the doctor led off ; but Harry directed a malicious glance at his companion, which seemed to say plainly, "Look out, and see if he doesn't go in."

But Harry felt disappointed and ill-used, as well as wet and muddy about the legs, for the doctor strode off steadily for about twenty yards, the boys following over perfectly firm ground.

"You should pick your way in a place like this, my lads. It only needs—"

Care, the doctor was about to say, but he did not ; for all at once, to Harry's intense delight, his leader uttered a sharp ejaculation, and, throwing himself flat on the ground, began to roll over and over, with his gun held upright against his breast, till he was close to the boys' feet, where he sat up, drew the stout hunting-knife he wore at his breast, and began to scrape the mud off one leg.

"Was it soft there, sir ?" said Harry, with mock seriousness.

"Soft !" cried the doctor. "Oh, you're laughing at me, eh ? Well, I'm fair game, I must own. Here, step back ! quick ! both of you. We're sinking."

It was quite true, for there was a bubbling, hissing, and gurgling sound arising from among the grassy growth, and the black water began to ooze up among the stems, so that as the boys ran back it splashed up, and the doctor followed, none too soon.

"Why, the whole place is a marsh," he said, looking back as soon as the ground felt more solid. "It is just as if the water of the river spread right up to the jungle and this part had become covered with weeds and plants till they were matted together and looked like a meadow."

"But," cried Harry, "I want to know how the elephants managed."

"There must be a sort of causeway of firm ground somewhere out in the middle there," replied the doctor. "I daresay we should

find it so if we went back with the boat to where the great creatures came out of the water."

"And we couldn't have the boat now, I suppose," said Harry, glancing in the direction of camp.

"No, but it does not matter. We should only find a muddy, elephant path, full of holes."

"Sorry I was so stupid, doctor," said Harry.

The doctor turned to him sharply and nodded.

"Yes, you have me on the hip there, Hal. Take it as a warning to yourself not to be in too great a hurry to condemn other people."

Phra smiled.

"What are we going to do?" he said. "It's too soon to go back."

"Well, we can't walk on this floating green carpet," replied Harry.

"Could we get along by the river?"

"We could try," said the doctor.

"Or go up along the edge of the jungle. We ought to find something worth shooting there."

"Let's try the edge of the jungle," said the doctor. "The ground must be firmer there."

Striking up to their right, they managed to get about fifty yards nearer the edge of the forest; but then they had to turn back and make for a point nearer the little camp, where two or three huge trees stood out like sentinels in front of the vast army of vegetation packed closely as trees could stand.

Here the earth proved to be firm, and for a few dozen yards they managed to progress among the trees at the very edge of the jungle. After that the way was stopped by the interlacing creepers and thorny rotans, and after a few minutes' trial it became evident that without the help of stout men with their parangs to clear the way, further progress was impossible.

"Let's go back again," said Harry. "One does get so hot and fagged."

"Better keep walking till your legs are dry," said the doctor. "I don't want you down with a feverish cold."

"They're nearly dry now," said Harry, "and they'll be quite dry by the time we get back."

"Yes," said Phra; "it's farther off than we think for, and will take longer."

"Back again, then," said the doctor; "but I do not like to be beaten like this. I wanted to see more of the elephants and their ways."

"Come to the big stables, then, Doctor, when we get back. Phra will take you and let you see all there are at home; won't you, Phra?"

"Of course, if the doctor wishes to see them."

"Much obliged," replied the doctor; "but it's the wild ones I want to study. What's that?"

He stopped short, and brought his gun round ready to fire at any danger which might assail them from the jungle.

The boys had heard what startled their companion, and cocked their guns. For suddenly there was the quick rush of something behind the dense screen of verdure—a something which seemed to have been watching them, and had darted off as soon as they came near.

"Wild pig?" asked Harry.

"No, I think it was more like a man," replied the doctor. "What do you say, Phra?"

"I think it was a man, but how could a man rush through the jungle like that? We must ask Sree if there are any wild tribe people about here."

"There would not be nearer than the mountain region," said the doctor; "but whatever it was has gone. Look, they're making signals for us to come back."

The boys looked in the direction of the camp, where a thin mat had been hoisted, flag fashion, at the end of one of the bamboo poles of the boat; and hurrying their steps a little they reached the great tree beneath which the cooking fire had been made, to find the boatmen finishing their rice, and a capitally cooked meal waiting for them in the boat.

Sree shook his head at the suggestion of any people being near.

"Plenty of wild beasts, Sahib; and I have seen the tracks of a tiger that has been down to the water. There are plenty of monkeys, too, the greybeards and the big, black fellows; but I don't think we should find savage people here in the jungle. It would be a wild boar or a rhinoceros. No, not a rhinoceros; he would not have run away. It might have been a tapir."

The evening changed very rapidly into night, and with the darkness came the wonderful chorus of strange sounds from the jungle and banks of the river, the splashings and coughing, barking utterances giving warning that the crocodiles were still plentiful. The fire-flies were even more beautiful there than in the denser portion where the river banks were hidden by great timber trees, for on both sides lower down the low, shrub-like growth was more abundant.

The scene was very beautiful, with the star-studded, clear, dark, sky above, and the reflection as it were of another star-spangled heaven in the smooth, gliding water at their feet, while the myriads of fire-flies suggested the existence of another intermediate star sphere in constant motion, now scintillating, now dying out, and again as if floating along the opposite shore like a low cloud of tiny orbs, golden-green, golden, pale lambent, and occasionally ruddier than Aldebaran or some kindred star.

There was less disposition for sitting up talking that night, and soon after the fire was well replenished, and its necessity made plain.

Phra was the first to call attention to the distant cry, which was exactly that of some enormous cat far away in the jungle.

"Calling his mate," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Perhaps the tiger whose tracks Sree saw in the soft mud this evening," said Harry. "I suppose he will not come near our fire, or try to get on board. Think we ought to keep watch, father?"

"Oh no, my boy. We are floating out here a good thirty feet from the land."

"But suppose the boat drifts to the side in the night?" suggested Phra.

"It is not probable, for we are right where the stream sets off the shore. We are not likely to be disturbed, boys. There is the proof."

Mr. Kenyon pointed to where the men had spread the mats over the horizontal bamboo, and were settling down to sleep.

"Yes, that is a pretty good sign," said the doctor; "the men would not take matters so coolly if there were any danger from tigers."

"Did the Sahibs hear the big tiger calling?" said Sree, thrusting his head out from beneath the men's awning.

"Yes, quite plainly," said Harry. "Think he'll come prowling about the fire, so as to give us a shot?"

"No, no, Sahib," replied the man, shaking his head; "he will be too careful."

"That was a clever way of putting it, Hal," said the doctor drily. "You did not say, Is there any fear of the tiger's swimming out to us?"

"No; why should I tell him that I was a bit nervous?" replied Harry frankly; "even if one does feel a bit scared, I can't help it, can I, father?"

"No, my boy; it is quite natural to feel a little nervous, and to make sure that one's gun is loaded and close at hand. But we must get used to these noises. We can't expect to come out here and live in such a wild place without being a bit startled sometimes. Good-night, boys. But you have not fastened down that mat to shut out the night air."

"Just going to, father," replied Harry. "I don't think, though, that we shall have so much mist here."

The final good-nights were said just as the last murmurs of the men's conversation forward died out, and then all was still, the darkness being relieved by the rays from the fire, which crackled and burned merrily, the light coming quite brightly at times through the interstices of the mats, and then, as the smoke rolled up decreasing again; while after shifting his position to get into a more comfortable attitude, Harry Kenyon drew a long, deep breath, with a touch of a yawn in it, and then told himself that he did not mean to feel in the slightest degree nervous about the strangeness of their position, but was going to have a good, long night's rest.

CHAPTER XIX

A NIGHT ALARM

SLEEP comes and sleep goes, and always seems beyond our control. Sometimes the weary one drops off soundly the moment his head has been comfortably settled upon the pillow ; at other times, however tired he may have been before going to bed, the very fact of having undressed has so thoroughly wakened him up that the object for which he has come to bed has been completely banished.

It was so with Harry Kenyon in some respects that night. He had not undressed, and he had not gone to bed, only made himself as comfortable as he could on a mat pillow two thwarts of the boat, using his hand as a pillow.

As comfortable as he could ! but it was not very comfortable, for the bottom of the boat was as hard as the one quill which the Irishman put beneath him to try what sleeping on a feather-bed was like. There was too much light in the open cabin, and he could hear the *ping-wing* of mosquitoes above him in the roof.

He shut his eyes tightly, but every now and then he could see that his eyelids looked translucent. The water was making quite a loud, rushing noise against the sides of the boat, and the barkings, croakings, and indescribable noises from jungle and river-bank seemed to be increasing minute by minute.

Harry shifted his position a little, and then felt annoyed, for close at hand he could hear a steady, deep breathing which he knew was his father's, and from just beyond, another deep respiration with a faint buzz in it, which was evidently the doctor's breath coming and going through his big, thick, ruddy-brown moustache.

"Why can't I go to sleep like that ?" muttered the lad. "I'm just as tired as they are, and yet I feel as if I were going to lie awake all night."

Harry uttered a sound very strongly resembling the grunt of one of the lower animals, and then resettled himself.

"Now I will go to sleep," he muttered.

But a quarter of an hour must have passed, and he was as wakeful as ever, while he was quite sure that he had heard the low, mournful cry of the tiger very near.

"Asleep, Phra ?"

No answer.

"Phra ! the tiger's coming quite near."

This in a whisper, but there was no response, for Phra was sleeping soundly.

"Oh, how hot it is ! I can't hardly breathe," muttered Harry ; "and there are those wretched old Siamese snoring under the mat forward as if they were doing it on purpose to keep me awake.—Wish I could get up and go for a walk.—How stupid ! It's mad

enough to go for a walk when it's broad daylight. I know it's impossible, and yet I get wishing such an idiotic thing as that.—Might sit up and open the mat, though, and watch the fire-flies.

"What stuff," he said to himself the next moment; "who's going to sit up all night watching fire-flies dancing about like sparks in tinder? Besides, if I opened the matting it might give some of us cold and fever, and it would be all my fault. Oh, why can't I go to sleep! There never was such an unlucky fellow as I am."

He tried turning, but he could not get into a more comfortable position, and he turned back and listened to the splashings in the river coming nearer and going farther away. Once more he began to think of a huge serpent up in the tree swinging itself down, and a faint rustling in the thatch he was sure must be the great reptile's head as it kept on touching the palm leaf matting; and in imagination he saw the forked tongue flicking in and out of the nick in the upper jaw, till a loud tap told him that it was only a beetle inside instead of outside, and it had lost its hold and fallen to the bottom of the boat.

"That was all fancy," he said to himself; "but that rustling noise ashore is not. I believe it's some big animal searching about the camp."

Crack!

"There, I knew it. A buffalo, I believe, and it put its hoof on a dead stick."

Crack, crick, crick, crackle, crackle.

Harry sighed with relief and opened his eyes widely to see how much lighter the interior of the matting and bamboo cabin had become through the fire ashore falling in, and some of the piled-up wood catching and burning briskly.

"Now then," the listener said to himself, "what am I going to fancy next?—I dunno," he added, after a pause. "I'm so wakenful, I could fancy anything. I know what I'll do. I'll go and wake old Sree, and get him to sit and talk to me."

Harry paused to think again. The old hunter was lying just outside the cabin, and the nearest to it of the men. Then Mike with his currant-dumpling-like face was beside him, and he would not want to wake him too. How was he to manage? If Sree had been sleeping in the side of the boat, he could have stretched out his hand and touched him, as there was no awning there, nothing but some baskets.

But the great difficulty was how to get past Phra and his father and the doctor before he could reach the matting, pull it aside, and touch Sree. It seemed impossible. It was very dark now, and there would be three pairs of legs to get over, and he felt sure that he would stumble over them and wake everybody up.

How to manage—how to do it—how to get by—how to get by? How to get by?

It was so easy. Sree woke up at a touch, and they sat on the top of the cabin and watched the fire-flies—and the blazing fire.

They listened to croakings and cries and the low howl of the tiger, which did not seem to be successful in finding his mate, and it was very calm and restful and pleasant out there in the night, only they dared not move for fear the thatch should give way, and let them both through on the top of those sleeping below.

And so they sat and whispered and talked about the elephants bathing, and the big one scenting them at last and giving the alarm, and the whole herd disappearing after crossing that green marsh place which let them through when they were walking. There was that strange rush that they heard too, that which Sree said was a wild boar, and then—*bump*!

What was that?

It was to Harry Kenyon just as if a boat had thumped up against theirs, and some one with a voice like his own had asked that question.

But there was no answer. All was perfectly still in the cabin, while the noises in the jungle and on the river banks were not so loud.

It was all dark too, for the fire had burned down, and there was no glimmering light through the interstices of the mats.

But he felt that he ought to see that fire, even if it were merely the glowing embers, seated as he was up there on the top of the cabin roof.

Absurd! How could he be sitting up there, and with Sree too!

They could not have got up there, and he was in his place in the cabin. All that was dreaming.

"Then I have been asleep," he said to himself. "I must have dropped off hours ago, and lain here till that woke me. Some one said, 'What was that?' No; I said it to myself, and seemed to hear it."

Harry ceased his musings, feeling that he was certainly wide awake now, and as certain that he had been awakened by a bump on the side of the boat, for there was a faint grinding sound as of another boat rubbing up against the side.

The boy turned hotter then in the darkness, for there was a low whispering plainly heard, and the first thought which came to him now was that some boat had come to attack them in the night, a boatload of the wild, piratical people who lived by robbing and bloodshed. He had from time to time heard of junks and trading boats being attacked and plundered, but only rarely in their neighbourhood. Certainly, though, this was one, and his hand stole to his gun, which he grasped tightly as with a quick movement he rose to a sitting position so that he might alarm his father.

Just then there was a quick, rustling sound as the matting curtain which separated them from the men forward was drawn aside, and with a strange sensation of palpitation in his breast, instead of calling to his sleeping companions, the lad involuntarily cocked both barrels of his gun.

The loud *click, click—click, click* gave the alarm.

"Who's that?" cried Mr. Kenyon, springing up.

"It is I, Sahib—Sree," came in the familiar voice.

"Yes! What is it?" said Mr. Kenyon, and as he spoke the clicking of gun-cocks, in company with a quick movement, told plainly enough that the other two occupants of the cabin were awake, and well on the alert for whatever danger there might be.

"Adong has come, Sahib," said Sree, whose voice trembled.

"Adong? What does this mean—is it some treachery?"

"I fear so, Sahib," said Sree huskily.

"And you have come to warn us?"

"Yes, Sahib."

"Come in here, then. Harry, hand this man a gun and ammunition. You, Sree—there is a boat out there?"

"Yes, Sahib; the one Adong came in."

"With a party of men?"

"No, no, Sahib; he came alone."

"Ah, and the men all side against us?"

"Yes, Sahib; I suppose all."

"Very well; then we must fight. But who is Adong?"

"The Sahib knows him: the young one of the two boys who help me hunt for wild things in the jungle."

"Oh, that young fellow!"

"Yes, Sahib; he looks to me as to a father."

"And yet goes against you?"

"He go against me, Sahib?" cried the man. "Why, he would lay down his life for me. As soon as he knew, he seized the first boat he could swim to and followed us up the river."

"But you said the men were all against us."

"Yes, Sahib; as far as I can make out, all the fighting men have risen, and they are killing and burning; and when Adong came after me, they were going in a great crowd with spear and kris against the King's house."

"What!" cried Phra wildly, and Harry caught his arm.

"Hush!" he whispered; "it may not be so bad. That man may have taken fright."

"You hear all this, Cameron?" said Mr. Kenyon hoarsely.

"Hear it!" groaned the doctor. "It is what we have always dreaded. And I am here! Oh, Kenyon, my wife—my wife!"

Mr. Kenyon drew a deep breath.

"Thanks, Sree," he said calmly; "I thought you meant there was danger here. Wake up the men at once."

"They are all awake and listening to Adong, Sahib. He had to run for his life. What will the Sahib do?"

"Go back at once."

"No, no, Sahib," cried the hunter wildly; "it would mean death to you all. They would seize the Prince, and kill him. You must wait till day, and then we will go on right up into the jungle, where you must hide till there is peace again, and you can go back

home. We can get food for you, and a hiding-place where the people who come to find and kill the young Prince shall never find where you are."

"Mr. Kenyon, you will not listen to this man?" cried Phra wildly; but he received no answer, for just then the doctor gripped his friend tightly by the arm in the darkness which seemed to add to the horror of the terrible situation.

"Kenyon," he whispered, "I am weak and ill. I cannot think. This stroke has driven me mad. Act for me, old friend—think for me. Help me to save my wife."

Mr. Kenyon's reply was a firm pressure of the hand, but some moments elapsed before he spoke.

"Sree," he said at last, "you are a brave, true servant, and your advice is good; but neither the doctor nor I can do as you say. What boat is this that has joined us? A small one, of course?"

"Yes, Sahib; it is for two rowers, but it was the only one Adong could get."

"It will do. Now listen, for I trust you."

"Yes, the Sahib always trusted his servant," replied Sree proudly.

"You will take command of this boat that we are in, and I trust to you and your men to fight for and protect your young Prince and my son."

"As long as we can fight, Sahib," said the man proudly. "We all love them, and would die for them."

"I know it, Sree. Then I trust you to find some hiding-place where they will be safe till this rising is at an end."

"Yes, Sahib; but what will the master and the doctor Sahib do?" said Sree excitedly, and without heeding the eager whispering going on close by.

"We take the small boat now directly, and go down the river."

"But it would be to meet boats coming up, Sahib," said the man excitedly. "You would be running upon bad men's spears."

"We have our guns, and shall be prepared," said Mr. Kenyon coldly.

"But the little sampan—in the darkness, Sahib. You would overset, and that means a horrible death too."

"Then you will ask two men to volunteer to take us."

"Adong and I would row you safely back, Sahib," said the man earnestly.

"No; I cannot spare you from watching over my son. You and your man, who know him so well, must stay."

"Sahib, we cannot spare you and the good doctor Sahib. Pray, pray do not try to go back. It would be only to lose your lives."

"Silence, man! We go to save the doctor Sahib's wife."

"Ah, yes! the sweet, good lady," sighed Sree.

"And the King is our friend; we cannot leave him like this. No more words; obey my orders."

"No!" shouted Harry, out of the darkness. "Stop where you are."

"Harry!" cried Mr. Kenyon.

"Yes, father, I hear; but if the King has been attacked, and—and—you know what I mean," said the boy, choking for a moment, "Phra says he is King and master now, and that this shall not be. We say we won't be treated like children and be sent away to be taken care of while you go down the river to fight."

"That is right," said Phra firmly. "Let me speak now, Hal. You are going to save dear Mrs. Cameron from these wretches—these fools, who have risen against my father; we must go too. You are going to try and save your friend, my father, who has never done anything but good for his people."

"Yes, and——"

"I have not spoken all, Mr. Kenyon," said the boy proudly. "You are going to try and save him. Well, I am his son. Not a man yet, but I can fight; and where should I be but helping to save him? What! Do you want him, if he lives, to be ashamed of the boy who ran away to hide in the woods? Do you want Hal to let his father go alone? Do you think we two could ever look dear Mrs. Cameron in the eyes again if we had been such a pair of cowards as that? No: Hal and I are coming with you, but there are not enough of us to attack and fight with all those wretches. We must try cunning against them, and go to the doctor's bungalow and to the palace by night, and bring those who are waiting for us to the boat. Then we can come back into the jungle to wait till my father goes back again to take his place. Now, Sree, clear away the mats and unfasten the boat; we must start back at once. Cast off the other, it will be in the way."

A heavy sigh rose from one occupant of the cabin, a deep groan from another, but not a word of opposition came from either of the elders; and the next minute the men forward were busy rolling up the mats and unmooring the boat, while two crept along outside the cabin to take their oars.

It was still intensely dark, for the matting at the cabin sides had not been rolled up, and Mr. Kenyon sat trying to whisper a few words of comfort to the doctor, who seemed completely prostrated by the news, when the former felt a hand laid upon his arm, and he started slightly, for in the black darkness he had not noticed that some one had drawn near.

"You are not very angry with me, father?" was whispered.

"Angry with you, my boy? No."

"Nor with me, Mr. Kenyon?"

"Nor yet with you, Phra, my dear lad. No. You made me feel very, very proud; but I think that I ought not to let you run such risks."

"God bless you both, boys, for what you have said," groaned the doctor. "Boys? No; you spoke like men, while I sit here

feeling weak and helpless as a child. But I shall be better soon—in a few minutes I shall be a man once more, and we must all talk, and plan, and scheme. For Phra is right ; it must be done with cunning, as we are so weak. Now please leave me to myself for a few minutes. First tell me, though, are we going back ? ”

“ Yes,” said Harry, after looking out between the mats ; “ the boat is steadily going with the stream. The other is floating yonder.”

The doctor drew a deep breath.

“ Hah ! ” he said ; “ that has taken a weight from my breast. Going back—going to the rescue. Heaven help us ! Shall we be too late ? ”

CHAPTER XX A DREARY RETURN

HARRY was correct : the boat was gliding steadily back with the stream, and Sree was standing right forward in the prow, looking out and uttering warnings from time to time of dangers ahead, in the shape of fallen trees, while he kept on admonishing the men to be content with keeping the boat straight while the darkness lasted, and deferring all attempts at making speed till the day came.

It was still very dark, the stars being nearly blotted out by the thin mist ; but there were sundry significant hints that morning was approaching, for the scintillation of the fire-flies had ceased, and the chorus of reptile and wandering beast in the depths of the forest was dying away.

Leaving Mr. Kenyon and the doctor talking, the boys were standing together right astern beyond the two rowers there, who were too intent upon working their oars to pay any heed to them and their discourse, though as it was carried on in English, they could have made out nothing, had they listened.

“ I’m glad father wasn’t cross,” said Harry after several awkward attempts at getting up a conversation, Phra having replied to all he said in monosyllables, as in the present instance.

“ Yes.”

“ It seemed so queer to get up and contradict his orders, and say we would do as we liked.”

“ Yes,” said Phra, with a sigh, and then he added, “ but it was quite right, for we both felt that it was like doing our duty.”

“ Ah ! ” cried Harry eagerly. “ So it was. Look here, Phra, old chap, don’t you be down-hearted.”

“ I am not going to be till I know the worst.”

“ That’s the way to take it ; for look here, that Adong would only know that there was gong-beating and spearing and setting places on fire—a regular riot. He would not know anything about how matters were at the palace.”

"No ; he could not," said Phra, with a sigh.

"And your father has got plenty of fighting men, who could soon stop a mob."

"If they were faithful to him," said Phra, sighing.

"Oh well, they would be for certain."

"I don't know," said Phra. "I have always been afraid of this. You see, the second king has made friends with the bonzes, and they can talk and preach to the people, and make them believe almost anything about my father."

"Because he does all kinds of scientific things," said Harry, "that they cannot understand."

"Yes," said Phra ; "it is the old story. They are too stupid to grasp the meaning of all he does, and because they cannot understand it, they teach the people to believe that it is all what you English people call 'witchcraft' and wickedness. Oh, I have not patience with the silly babies—they are not men."

"I hope we shall have a chance to knock some of their thick heads together. There, you are getting in better heart now about the news."

Phra turned upon him sadly.

"Are you getting in better heart about poor Mrs. Cameron ?" he said.

"Oh, Phra !" cried Harry passionately. "Don't."

"You tell me to be of good heart about my father and you are in despair about Mrs. Cameron."

"Yes, that's right," cried Harry passionately ; "but I won't be so any longer, for I don't believe that any of your people, even the very worst of them, would be such wretches as to hurt her."

Phra uttered a low groan.

"What !" cried Harry. "You do believe they would ?"

"Our people," said Phra sadly, "are, as my father has said to me, quiet and good and gentle as can be. They always seem merry and happy ; but deep down in their nature there is a something which can be stirred up, and then they are like the fierce savages from the mountains yonder. They will do anything terrible then, and these wretches who are trying to place the second king in my father's place know that and have driven them to rise. Hal, we can't tell what may have happened till we get down home ; but if they have killed my father, I am king, and I shall pray night and day that I may grow quickly into a man, so that I may kill and kill and kill till I feel that my dear father is avenged. It will be war until I have done my duty there."

Harry was silent, as he stood listening and gazing in his companion's face, which had suddenly seemed to start out of the darkness—the face alone ; all else was pretty well invisible—and there it was, a strange, pale, ghastly-looking visage, distorted by the agony in the boy's breast, and the deadly determination the pangs had brought forth.

Harry shuddered, and for some time the only sounds heard were the murmur of voices in the cabin and the *swish* of water as the men dipped their oars.

"Your father was right," said the English boy at last.

"What about?" said Phra hoarsely.

"About the Siamese people being so amiable and gentle until they are stirred."

"Yes, I see what you mean," replied Phra, "and I suppose it is so, Hal. I feel as if I can see my poor father lying dead and covered with bad wounds given by a set of cowards rushing upon him, and it makes me seem to see blood, and I want to punish them for killing one who has thought of nothing but doing the people good."

"There, don't think such things any more," cried Harry. "I won't. It can't be true. I'm going to believe that we shall find him and Mrs. Cameron quite well. Yes; I know how it would be, for your father is such a thorough gentleman in his ways, and so thoughtful. As soon as he heard of there being any trouble, he would either go or send one of the people with a lot of spearmen to protect them, and bring Mrs. Cameron and all the English people into the palace. Now then, what have you got to say to that?"

"Yes, I think he is sure to have done that," said Phra, speaking very slowly and gravely. "He would—if he had time; but suppose the first he heard of the trouble was in the mad rush made by his murderers."

"Shan't!" cried Harry. "I won't suppose anything of the kind. But I say, it's a pity that we didn't take more notice about what I heard said that day when we were lying in the boat place."

"Yes," said Phra; "but I did not think we need mind a few bitter words. Such things have been so often said by the discontented people."

"Discontented!" cried Harry angrily; "and a deal they had to be discontented about! They always seemed, from the poorest to the richest, as comfortable and as happy as could be."

The morning broke as bright and sunny as ever, but to those on board the boat all was changed. The excitement and delight of the trip, with its constant array of fresh objects, were gone. The birds which flashed out of the trees looked dull of colour; the troops of monkeys bounding through the branches on either side were unnoticed; and the gorgeous displays of flowers that here and there greeted the eyes of the travellers excited no attention.

The crocodiles seemed to Harry to be the only things in keeping with their situation, as in a gloomy, despondent way he went to the fore part of the boat to look out for them on a mud bank, or lying, with only their eyes visible on the surface of the water, in some eddy or pool.

The constant presence of these loathsome reptiles suggested to him the troubles at the city and its outskirts. And he felt that there would be fighting, with people slain and tossed into the

stream, where the crocodiles would gather in swarms ; and there were moments when he almost wondered that some strange instinct did not lead the horrible creatures to follow the boat instead of hiding in the dark parts, where the trees hung their branches low down and touching the water.

After a time he heard his name called, and he went back to the cabin, where he felt quite hurt and disgusted to see that Mike had prepared a comfortable breakfast, and his friends were waiting for him before beginning.

Harry's face must have spoken plainly his wonder at seeing the doctor, so short a time before overcome with grief, looking perfectly calm and serious, and prepared to take his place. His father noticed it, and spoke at once.

"Yes, my boy," he said, "we must eat and drink, or the machinery will be useless when we want it most for thinking and acting. Sit down and make a good breakfast."

"Oh, father," cried the boy passionately, "I feel as if I could not touch anything."

"We all do, Hal," said Mr. Kenyon ; "but we may have to fight, and we shall require all our strength in our efforts to save Mrs. Cameron and the King."

Harry nodded, took his place, and—there is no other way of describing what followed—ate and drank savagely, acting as if every morsel or draught that passed his lips were to give him strength for what might come.

The meal was soon ended, and Mike received his orders to see that the men were refreshed, while the doctor and Mr. Kenyon commenced talking, with the result that the two boys now went right aft and sat together looking up stream.

For some minutes neither spoke, and then Harry broke out angrily :—

"It makes me feel mad," he cried.

"Yes," said Phra, "and one feels the worse at having to sit here and wait, without being able to do anything."

"I didn't mean that," cried Harry angrily ; "I mean about sitting and eating and drinking there, just as if I was an animal without any feeling. It's horrible."

"Your father was quite right," said Phra ; "we do want to be strong."

Harry grunted, and turned away his face, to sit scowling at the river, while Phra rested his head upon his hand.

"Oh," cried Harry at last, "I should like to kill some one."

Phra smiled at him sadly.

"Perhaps we shall have to try before long," he said.

"I hope so. I should like to help kill all the wretches who have made all this trouble."

"Should you ?" said Phra, with a faint smile. "But look here, Hal, you will try and help me to save my father ?"

"Will I?" cried the boy angrily. "Why, you know I will. Here, Phra, let's try and think out some way of getting him out of the palace."

"I'm afraid we shall find that he has shut himself up there, and that we cannot get near him."

"Well, so long as he is safe we need not mind."

They sat on talking and planning together, more for the sake of keeping from dwelling on the great trouble than from any hope of thinking out something feasible, and the day wore on till the boat was drawn up to an opening in the apparently endless jungle.

Harry said to his companion that it was a shame, but it was a necessity. Food had to be cooked for the men as well as for themselves, and it was no loss of time, for after a couple of hours' rest the men worked with renewed energy, the boat gliding swiftly down the stream till it became too dark to venture farther amidst the many dangers to navigation. In fact, they had kept on till, in spite of the native boatmen's skill, the light craft was run half over a huge tree-trunk lying out at right angles to the bank, and for a time a terrible capsizing was imminent.

For the bows were clean out of the river for some distance, and the water began to rush in over the stern, till several of the men crept forward, with the result that the bows went down so suddenly, as the craft balanced on the great trunk, that the water rushed in at the other end, and it seemed to be a foregone conclusion that they would sink. For with a rush and a plunge they cleared the obstacle, gliding over into the deep water, the boat filling to gunwale as she came to a level again, with every one preparing to swim for the nearest shore.

But Sree called upon the little crew to follow his example, and they all glided overboard, taking opposite sides, and supported themselves by holding on to the boat.

Then, in obedience to calls from Sree, the boys handed the men various articles from Mike's little kitchen arrangements. Those left on board took crock and bucket, and from their united efforts in baling, all danger of sinking was soon at an end, while in a few minutes the men one by one crept back into the boat, where they could bale with more effect.

Finally the boat was entirely freed from water, and an opening, which happened to be near at hand, was reached, a fire made for drying clothes, and as wretched a night as could be imagined was spent.

But they were all dry and able to start the moment it began to be light, and that day was a repetition of the preceding, and followed by another despondent night, this time, though, one which gave refreshment to all.

That next day they knew they would reach the river town, and had to time themselves so as not to get there before dark, in spite of the eagerness for news. But it was hard to contrive

everything to their wishes. It had been expected that they would get right back two hours before sunset, and this meant lying up in some creek for that space, while Sree or Adong went forward by land to reconnoitre and bring news of the state of affairs ; but it so happened that the tide had not been counted upon, and instead of gliding down with the stream for the latter part of the way, they had to force the boat against an adverse current, so that it became hard work to get to their destination by dark.

CHAPTER XXI

A HIDING-PLACE

LONG before the more familiar parts of the river were reached, preparations had been made in the way of seeing that the guns were loaded, though their use would be only in some grave emergency, since it was fully grasped that force would in all probability be of no avail. Clever scheming must be the weapon, though how to bring it to bear would depend upon circumstances.

At last they were nearing the part of the river where it was lined with the walls of the great temples, and farther on with boats. In a very short time they would be abreast of the palace and of the little English quarter, Mr. Kenyon's home being farthest away.

And now, to the surprise of all, Sree spoke out earnestly, unasked.

" If the place is in the hands of the rebels," he said, " the Sahibs would lose their lives directly they landed."

" I cannot help that," said the doctor. " I must land as soon as I am near home."

" The doctor Sahib will not be doing his best to save his wife," said Sree sternly.

" No, Doctor, you must stay in the boat while I land," said Phra.

" To be killed at once," said Sree. " No, we will not let our Prince land now. Sahibs, I am like the rest of the people, and I can go ashore without being stopped. You must trust to me to go first and bring news."

" I cannot wait ; it is impossible," said the doctor.

" I must go and find what has happened to my father," cried Phra.

And all the time the boat was being urged steadily on by the rowers, nearer and nearer to the river town ; but so far there was nothing to suggest danger, for the customary sounds arose like a low murmur from the distance, and a faint glow hung above the river—the reflection from the paper lanthorns hanging from the boats.

" All seems to be unchanged," said Mr. Kenyon, breaking a long pause.

"Yes; it may be a false alarm," said the doctor. "Tell your men to row faster, Sree, and to stop at the first landing-place beyond the palace."

"The Sahib doctor does not see," replied the old hunter. "Something must have happened. Where are the lights?"

"Yonder," said the doctor, pointing to the reflection.

"Oh, Sahib, those are as nothing," said the old man. "And we can hardly hear the city breathe. We are close there, and we see that faint light and hear that little buzz of voices. It's more like a few insects. When I have come out of the jungle far away, it has been more bright than that and twice as loud. Will the Sahib tell his friend the doctor he must stay and I must go and see?"

"Yes, Cameron, Sree is right," said Mr. Kenyon. "Let him go first."

"My wife!" said the doctor, in a hoarse whisper so full of despair that a choking sensation rose to Harry's throat as he sat there in the dark.

"It means death, Sahib," said Sree plaintively, and the boat glided on, till, rounding a bend, those on board could see that very few lit-up houseboats were visible, and that the light came from the open ground on either side of the palace. While hardly had they grasped that when there was a sudden increase of the faint glow, and the loud, jarring noise of gongs beaten, followed by a scattered firing, the reports sounding loud in the darkness around.

A thrill ran through all present, and each drew a deep breath, for it was evident that the danger was very close, and in all probability watchers might be hidden among the bushes of the river bank, whose presence would be made known by the throwing of spears.

"The Sahib doctor hears," whispered the old hunter; "there is fighting going on by the palace. He will stay, and let his servant go and see?"

"Yes; go," said the doctor huskily.

"It is right, Cameron," whispered Mr. Kenyon.—"Now, Sree, what will you do?"

"Leave it to me, Sahib," was the reply, and turning to the men he whispered his orders, and all but one of the rowers laid in their oars, while the last just sent the boat gently along under the farther bank of the river, where the eddy made the task less difficult, and for the next few hundred yards they glided along under the walls and terraces of the principal Wats or temples, till they drew near to the palace, and Harry laid his hand upon that which came out of the darkness and gripped his arm.

"Look," whispered Phra, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes; I see," was the reply, and the two boys strained their eyes to make out what was going on near the palace, where paper lanthorns were gliding here and there, and a low buzz arose as of

many voices ; but the palace itself, as far as they could make out for the trees, was quite dark, and not a sound arose.

The firing had ceased before they drew near, and save the lights moving among the trees, and the buzz of voices, there seemed to be nothing more that they could learn.

The boat glided on silently and without challenge, while to all appearances, as far as they could make out in the darkness, there was not another vessel on the river, till they had passed the stone landing-place and reached the other side of the palace, where again a few paper lanthorns were seen moving here and there, and now and again came the faint sound of talking.

And now lower down they could just make out the lights of a few boats moored on their side of the river, but only a few, where they should have been packed close together.

They were now nearing the bank where the bungalows of the English residents had been erected, and it needed a few passionate, appealing words on the part of Mr. Kenyon to make the doctor refrain from landing.

"For aught we know there may be hundreds watching the boat," whispered Harry's father, "and your landing may mean the signal for a shower of spears. Sree, go on with your plans."

"Then there must be silence, Sahib."

"Yes, of course. Where will you land ? "

"Yonder, Sahib, and as soon as I have leapt on the bank Adong, who is owing, will take the boat across again and tie it up."

"Yes, and then ? "

"You will wait. A boat can lie there without being noticed even in the daytime. When I pipe like one of the little herons that fish from the bank, the boat must come over and fetch me, for I shall have news."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Kenyon hastily, while the rest eagerly drank in every word. "You will take one of the double guns ? "

"No, Sahib ; nothing but my kris in my padung. If I take a gun and am seen, I shall seem an enemy and be speared."

"Yes ; right. And we are to wait until you come back ? "

"That is so," whispered Sree. "Now, silence. No one will speak. Adong knows."

The next moment the prow of the light boat touched the dark bank, and Sree leaped right ashore.

Harry held his breath, expecting to hear the rush of feet ; but all was still, and the boat went gliding back through the darkness to the other side, where the men made it fast, and then squatted down upon their heels in perfect silence, watching the faint lights across the river.

It was a terrible silence, and Harry wondered, as he sat there listening for anything which might give him a clue to the state of affairs, at the change which had taken place during their short absence. When they left, the place was bright with gaiety, and

the river fringed with houseboats full of light-hearted people ; now all was painfully still, save the murmur from the direction of the palace, while the river glided by, lapping the sides of the boat, and making the boy shudder as he thought of how much it could tell of the secrets hidden beneath its dark waters.

All at once Phra started violently, for a loud shouting and beating of gongs arose once more from the direction of the palace. They could see lights, too, moving, as if a party were on their way to make an attack ; but the sound of firing recommenced and kept on till the gong-beating ceased, when the lights seemed for the most part to die out.

"Those mean attacks being made on the palace, Phra," whispered Harry, "and the firing is from our friends."

"Yes," said Phra ; "but it is so hard to bear. Hal, I must go across and see."

"No," said a voice close to his ear. "You must stay and bear it, Phra, till we get news."

"Don't say that, Mr. Kenyon," whispered Phra ; "it is so terrible."

"Yes, my boy, I know it ; but be a man. It is evident that your father and his friends have beaten the enemy off again."

"Or been killed," said Phra bitterly.

"Oh no, my lad ; if the enemy had won, there would have been a burst of shouting, and——"

Mr. Kenyon paused, unwilling to proceed.

"I know what you were going to say, Mr. Kenyon ; they would have set fire to the palace."

"Yes ; they would have tried to burn the place," said Mr. Kenyon hurriedly. "Hist ! a boat is coming."

All crouched down lower in the bottom and waited, for there was the splash of oars and the murmur of many voices, suggesting that the boat must be large ; and in a short time they could see that it was one of the biggest barges, propelled by many oars, while as the covered-in part loomed up before them in the darkness while passing, the rapid chatter told that it was crammed with men.

There was little fear of their being noticed, as the boat lay close up under the bank, its occupants sitting so low that they were pretty well hidden by the side ; but Harry held his breath, for he felt assured that these were fighting men on their way to join in the attack upon the palace. But his anticipation of a shower of spears was not realized, and the great barge, probably one of the king's, passed by without noticing them.

As soon as the vessel was out of hearing, Harry whispered,—

"Is that full of friends or enemies, Phra ?"

"Enemies," said the lad bitterly. "If my father is shut up like that, and the palace being attacked, he will have no friends. Oh, how long—how long must I wait before I go to help ?"

"Patience, my boy, patience," said Mr. Kenyon softly ; "we

are all as anxious as you ; but when we stir it must be to do good, not to increase your father's anxieties."

"How could we ?" said Phra impatiently.

"By placing the son he believes to be beyond the reach of his enemies in a position of danger."

"That was just the right thing to say to him, poor fellow !" thought Harry. "I wish I was as clever as my father. Poor old Phra ! he can't say anything to that."

Harry was right. Phra remained silent, but from time to time, as he sat with his hand resting upon his comrade's arm, the English boy could feel it quiver as if from the pain he suffered.

Suddenly there was a fresh burst of shouting from across the river in the direction of the palace, suggestive of the occupants of the boat having joined those they supposed to be the besiegers ; and now the party sat anxiously listening for another attack, but they waited in vain.

And how long the time seemed that Sree had been away ! It was impossible to make any calculation in such a position, but everything had for some time been silent in the direction of the palace, where the lights had gone out one by one, while lower down the river there was not one to be seen, only the twinkling of the fire-flies in the gardens on the other side.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the doctor saying aloud,—

"Is he playing us false—has he escaped to save himself ?"

"No," said Mr. Kenyon firmly, "but speak lower. Sound travels along the river by night."

"Sree would not cheat us, Mr. Cameron," said Harry bitterly. "I'll answer for him."

"Then why doesn't he return—why doesn't he return ?"

"Because he has much to do."

"But he must have been three hours away," said the doctor excitedly. "I cannot bear this inaction longer. Kenyon, you must have me put ashore yonder."

"No," said Harry's father sternly ; "I must take the lead here, for all our sakes. The man has his life to look to, and has no doubt had to thread his way among enemies."

"He will not come back," said the doctor. "I will wait another half-hour, and then at all costs I will be set ashore."

"Be silent, please," said Mr. Kenyon sternly.

"Ah, there he is," whispered Harry, for there was a low, hoarse, piping cry from the opposite bank.

Adong rose silently to his feet and raised his oar upright, while one of the men forward set the boat free and gave it a good thrust out into the current.

Adong lowered his oar silently into the water, not making the slightest splash ; but to the astonishment of the little English party, instead of urging the boat across he gave a few vigorous thrusts and drove her back to the bank, squatting down again in his place.

"What does this mean?" whispered Mr. Kenyon sternly.

"Hist! Boat coming," whispered back the man, in his own tongue.

Those who heard him listened, but they could not hear a sound, and at the end of a few moments Mr. Kenyon turned angrily upon the man.

"There is no boat," he said, in the man's language. "Row across directly."

"No," said the man; "boat coming. Adong hear much farther than the master. Boat coming."

Harry thought of the man's life in the jungle, passed in tracking the wild creatures with his teacher, Sree, and felt that his senses would be keener than theirs, so that the boy was in nowise surprised when at the end of a minute the faint, far-off sound of paddling was borne to his ears, and a boat came nearer—a boat propelled by only one oar, and as far as he could make out with only two people in it besides the rower, for he could hear whispering as it passed like a shadow on the dark background in front of where he sat.

Adong made no movement till he was satisfied that the boat was out of hearing. Then uttering one word, the men who had held their prow to the bank once more gave a firm thrust, sending it into the current, and Adong sent the boat steadily across the river.

"Quicker! quicker!" whispered Phra, for from lower down came the sound of oars being used with furious haste, and voices were heard speaking angrily, while having the tide in their favour the fresh boat came along at so rapid a rate that the one the English party were in had only just time to glide in among some overhanging bushes by the bank, when a good-sized barge passed by so near to them that Harry felt that they must have been seen, though the next moment he knew that the passers-by would have looked upon their boat as one moored to the bank and empty.

"Sree!"

"I am here, Sahib," whispered the hunter, stepping down to them as soon as the barge was beyond hearing; "that is an enemy's boat, I think, in chase of one which went up before."

"Your news, man—your news!" whispered the doctor hoarsely.

"I went to the doctor Sahib's house."

"Yes! My wife?"

"The doctor Sahib's house is gone."

"Burned?"

"Yes, Sahib, to ashes. There was no one there."

"Did you go to the bungalow, Sree?" whispered Harry.

"Burnt down to embers, Sahib Harry. Every house belonging to the English masters has been burned down."

"But man—man!" whispered the doctor wildly, "what are houses? Our friends, the English people? have you found out nothing more?"

"Yes, Sahib Doctor ; the ladies were saved by the King and his spearmen. There was a great fight, and they were all taken to the palace. Not one was killed."

"Thank God !" groaned the doctor, and a deep silence reigned for a few minutes—a silence Phra respected for the doctor's sake, though he was burning to hear more. At last the lad spoke.

"How did you know this ?"

"From my boy, Lahn. I sought for and found him, my Prince. He saw everything : the fight, the English Sahibs and their ladies taken to the palace, and the houses burned by the people. Lahn is here with me now."

"Tell me about my father," said Phra, with his voice trembling and an agonizing pain attacking him for fear lest he hoped too much. "He is safe ?"

"Safe when Lahn was with the crowd of men at sunset. He is in the part of the palace by the little court where the young Prince's rooms are. The gates are shut, and there is much fighting by the second king's friends, who are trying to get in."

"And my father has all his brave spearmen to defend him ?"
There was silence.

"Why do you not speak ?" cried Phra angrily.

"It is hard to tell, Sahib Phra," said the old hunter sadly. "Lahn tells me that the King's guards fought for him till he and the ladies and the Sahibs were safe in the palace ; then at a word from one of the bonzes they threw down their spears and krisses in the courtyard, and joined the King's enemies outside the walls."

"The traitors—the traitors !" groaned Phra ; "and we trusted them so. But tell me, Sree : those lights, the cries, and the beating of gongs to-night, what did it all mean ?"

"Fighting, Sahib. The King's friends are very few, but some of his servants are with him still, and they beat the enemy off. Spears cannot reach so far as guns. Lahn says fighting like that has gone on all day."

"Hah !" ejaculated Phra. "But tell me : you, did you do nothing ?"

"Yes, Sahib Phra ; that made me so long. I went up in the dark to where there are many hundreds of the enemy all about the palace."

"But did you try to find a way by which we may get in to-night ?"

"No, Sahib ; the enemy are many, and they watch every place."

"But the terrace ?" said Phra eagerly. "We could take the boat up there."

"Two of the King's barges are there, with many men guarding the landing-place, so that the King and his friends should not escape by the river."

"But at the back there, by the elephant houses ?"

"A hundred men are there."

"By the garden?"

"It is full of spearmen."

"Oh, is there no place?" whispered Phra—"nowhere that we could crawl up unseen?"

"The Sahib Prince knows the place better than his servant, and that it is strong. His servant would have tried to climb over the wall, but there were many men everywhere, and he could not get near."

"If we could only let my father know that we are near!" said Phra excitedly.

"If we could, Sahib," said Sree slowly, "he would command you to escape, and wait till the danger is at an end."

"Yes—yes—he would wish me to go, but I cannot. Mr. Kenyon—Doctor—what shall we do?"

"We must get help," said Mr. Kenyon promptly. "Phra, my dear lad, we can do nothing alone."

"But who would help us at a time like this? The priests and the whole city have risen against my father; who will help us now?"

"We must go down to the mouth of the river as soon as it is day, and see if there are any English or French vessels there. They would help us."

"Lahn says the river is full of the second king's fighting boats, Sahib, and you could not go down. The boat would be stopped, and you would all be slain."

There was silence in the boat till Sree spoke again.

"The Sahibs must hide."

"Hide?" cried Phra; "where could we hide now? We should be seen, and to please the bonzes the people would give us up."

"You must hide in the boat, Sahib Phra," said the old hunter quietly.

"What, go up the river again, and get into the jungle?"

"No, Sahib; we must be here—close to the palace."

"But with all the enemy's boats about, how can we?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"By being bold, Sahib," said Sree. "His servant will make the boat look dirty and common with mats where the cabin is, and throw that into the river. The Sahibs must hide beneath the mats; the men can hide their good padungs and sit in the boat and fish and chew."

"Yes, yes," said Phra; "no one would notice them. That is good. We must not go away."

"But help?" said Mr. Kenyon; "we must get help."

"His servant will swim to some boat, Sahib—he will find one, no doubt—and go down the river to try for help."

"No," said Mr. Kenyon, "we want you here. I will write on a leaf of my pocket-book, and you must send one of your men."

"Yes, Lahn would take it to an English ship if there is one," said Sree, whose voice suggested that he was pleased that he was wanted in the boat. "Lahn is here, Sahib. May he come on board?"

"Of course."

Sree uttered a peculiar sound, and a dark figure rose from the ground where it had lain flat, and glided down the bank into the boat.

"Now across to the other shore where we can hide," said Mr. Kenyon.

"No, Sahib," said Sree in a low, earnest whisper; "his servant has been thinking. We will go down to the landing-place at the bottom of the bungalow garden."

"Why there?" said Phra excitedly.

"Because the Sahib Prince's servant thinks if the cabin is taken down and thrown into the river to float away, the boat can be pushed between the big posts of the landing-place, and will lie under the bamboo floor."

"Yes, when the tide's down," said Harry; "but when the tide rises, what then?"

"The boat will be pushed close up against the bottom of the floor, and the water will rise a little round it, Sahib."

"But we should be shut up like in a trap, Sree, and regularly caught," said Harry.

"No, Sahib; the bamboos are split, and only tied down with rotan cane. It would be easy to undo two or three, so that we could pass out, or to leave a little of the boat outside one end, so that there would be room to get out on to the floor."

"Well, you are a clever old fellow, Sree," said Harry eagerly. "And now the bungalow is burnt no one will come there."

"No, Sahib; they will keep away. Does Sahib Kenyon feel that we should go there?"

"Yes, my man, yes. It will be less of a risk, for boats that pass will not think of meddling with the one lying there."

That was enough. Sree said one word, and Adong rose from where he had crouched, plunged his oar into the water, and forced the boat downward against the tide, while Sree and the boatmen set to work and cut loose the mats which hung from the cabin roof. These were carefully rolled up by one of the men, while the bamboo rafters were cut away. Then four men stood on the sides of the boat, each by one of the stout uprights, and at the word of command raised the light matting and palm-thatch roof, and heaved it away, to fall edgewise with a splash into the dark river.

Ten minutes later the last of the four uprights was thrust overboard, and almost directly after the garden landing-place was reached, and Sree's calculations were put to the test.

They proved to be quite correct, for there was just room for the boat to glide in between the bamboo posts; and as to height, the

occupants were able to keep upon their seats with a few inches above their heads between them and the joists which supported the bamboo floor.

"Ah!" said Phra between his teeth; "we shall be in hiding here."

"Yes," whispered Harry; "but I don't think we shall be safe."

"I don't know," said his father; "an open hiding-place is often the most secure."

CHAPTER XXII DARING PLANS

THE tide rose but a trifle higher, so that there was no imprisonment such as had been suggested, and the boatmen, after a modest meal of rice, calmly settled themselves down to sleep.

But, like his employers, Sree was wakeful, and sat near, ready to answer questions or offer advice.

He said that he believed they might stay where they were, unquestioned, for days; and as for provisions, it would be easy for him or one of his men to go here or there about the place and buy food.

These minor questions were soon disposed of. The main topic—how to rescue the King and their friends—then took up all their thought and kept them watching and waking hour after hour, a certain equality now seeming to reign, and the boys' suggestions being listened to eagerly by their elders.

But everything proposed seemed to be full of difficulties. The first most natural and simplest was to get the besieged away in boats, for the rivers and canals were the highways, the roads through the jungle mere elephant tracks. But this was at once seen to be impossible in the face of the facts that the way to the river was watched, and the large boats in the hands of the enemy.

Then there was the plan of escaping by means of the elephants, the whole of which were, according to Lahn, still in their great houses, close to the part of the palace defended by the King and his friends.

But supposing it possible that the whole of the defenders could be mounted upon the huge, docile beasts, and could succeed in forcing their way through the crowd of assailants, where could they go? Only into the jungle to starve, for there was no place to which they could flee.

It was always the same: they were face to face with the fact that in such a self-dependent place the King, who was all-powerful one day, might be the next weaker and more helpless than the humblest of his subjects.

Plan after plan was discussed during the calm silence of that night, when all were in momentary expectation of hearing fresh

alarms and attacks ; but every idea seemed perfectly futile, and a dead silence fell.

Harry was the first to break the silence.

" Why don't you propose something, Phra ? " he said. " We've been talking all this time, and you've hardly said a word."

" I've been listening," said the boy gravely, " and I have thought."

" Yes, what have you thought ? "

" That if we could think of some plan of escape, my father would help you to get all your friends away."

" Yes, of course," said Harry, for Phra had stopped. " Well ? "

" But he would not leave the place himself. I know my father. He would say, ' I am the king here by right, and I will never leave. I would sooner die.' "

" I fear so," said Mr. Kenyon.

" I can only think of my father," continued Phra ; " you only of your friends, and so we think differently."

" Oh no," said Harry. " Your troubles are ours, just as our troubles are yours."

" That is so," replied the boy ; " but I can only think of joining my father to help him defend the palace till he has driven his enemies away."

" Phra is right," said the doctor. " We cannot bring our people away—it seems impossible. We must devote ourselves to joining the King and defending the palace against all enemies."

" It is good advice," said Mr. Kenyon, " but how can we join them ? It seems impossible, too."

" We have not tried," said the doctor coldly.

" Sree has tried to find a way in," replied Mr. Kenyon, " and he says it cannot be done. Do you not, Sree ? "

" Yes, Sahib. If we go as we are, your servant and the men could perhaps make the second king and those with him believe that they were friends ; but whether by night or by day, if the sahibs try to get there, they will all be speared. It is what the enemy would gladly do."

" We could fight," said Phra proudly. " We have guns."

" Yes, Sahib Phra, and some of the enemy would be killed, but what are we against so many ? "

" Ah, what indeed ? " sighed Mr. Kenyon. " A dozen or so against thousands upon thousands."

" Phra Sahib is right," continued Sree. " He is prince, and should take us to join his father the King."

" Yes, but how ? " said the doctor.

" It can only be by cunning, Sahib," replied the man.

" Hist ! One moment," said Harry excitedly ; " what about the men ? The spear-bearers forsook the King ; how can we trust these boatmen ? "

" Because they love and believe in the sahibs," said Sree. " I think we can trust them."

"But your two men, Sree?"

"My two—Adong and Lahn—Sahib Harry?" said the old hunter with a little laugh. "I have always been like a father to them, and they would follow me, even if it were to be killed."

"And you, Sree?" the said doctor bitterly; "why should you be faithful to us?"

"I don't know, Sahib," said the man simply; "only that Sahib Kenyon has been like a father to me ever since he brought me back here to my people from among the Indian sahibs, where I had lived for years. He has always been my good, kind master, who fed me when I was hungry, and gave me money to buy clothes. I don't know how it is, but I feel that I belong to him and the young Sahib Harry; and if they said to me, 'Sree, you must die that we may escape and live,' well, it would only be what I should do, and I should be happy. Yes, sahibs, I should die."

"I know you would, Sree," whispered Harry, leaning over to grasp the man's hands. "He would, wouldn't he, father?"

"Yes, my boy, I believe he would. He has saved my life more than once."

"Oh, I believe in Sree, too," said the doctor excitedly. "But those we love are perishing close by, and we are doing nothing."

"I know what we might do," said Harry eagerly.

"Yes, what?" said the doctor.

"Wait till to-morrow night."

"Wait till to-morrow night!" echoed the doctor bitterly.
"Wait while they perish!"

"We don't know but what they can keep the enemy off till then," said Harry, with spirit.

"True," said his father quickly; "but what if we wait till to-morrow night?"

"Then it would be dark, and we might go and join with the enemy when they make one of their attacks. Then, when they retire, we might fall down as if wounded, and wait close up to the gate."

"Yes," said Phra eagerly, "and as soon as the enemy were far enough off we could call to those in the palace that we were friends, and they would open and let us in."

"That sounds wild," said Mr. Kenyon, "but it is possible. What do you say, Sree?"

"No, Sahib; it would do for me and the men. We could get into the palace that way, but the Sahibs? No. The enemy would know them at once, however dark."

"True," said Mr. Kenyon.

"It is not possible," groaned the doctor. "We must try by force to break through."

"That would mean death to all, Sahib," said Sree in a low, sad voice; "and there would be no help for your friends."

"Stop," said Phra. "I think it might be done."

"Hist ! Sahib Phra ; a boat is coming."

All listened, but the Europeans once more felt that they had been deceived, till suddenly there was a faint splash, followed by the dull pattering of water against a prow, and this sound came nearer and nearer till a big, dark shadow propelled by quite a dozen oars was seen to glide up the river towards the palace landing-place.

They waited till the boat passed out of hearing, and Phra went on.

"Harry and I could darken our faces, hands and legs easily enough so as to pass for common people. We did once dress like that. You remember, Hal, when we went right down among the house-boats and no one knew."

"Yes, I remember," said Harry shortly.

"It would be easy for us," said Phra ; "but——"

The boy stopped.

"Would Doctor Cameron and I disguise ourselves for such a purpose as this ? Certainly we would."

"Yes, of course," said the doctor huskily. "What about the native clothes—the baju and padung ?"

"They would be easier to get, Sahib—easier than spears."

"Spears ?" said the doctor ; "we have our guns."

"But they would betray us, Cameron," said Mr. Kenyon. "We should have spears for ourselves and men."

"There are plenty of guns in the palace," said Phra. "Sree, could we get spears by then ?"

The old hunter was silent for a while, as if thinking deeply.

"How long is it before morning ?" he said.

"It must be near day-break now," replied Mr. Kenyon.

"No, Sahib. Not for two hours yet. There are many spears in the big boats that have gone up to the palace landing-place ; and if the men on board are asleep, we might get what we want."

"There are sheaves and sheaves in the guard-rooms, Sree, if we could get them."

"Yes, Sahib Phra," replied the man ; "but that we could not do. If the sahibs will get on to the floor above us and stay there with the men, it is very dark to-night, and Adong and Lahn might go with me in the boat. We could row up very quietly, and perhaps get enough from one of the barges."

"Try," said Mr. Kenyon laconically. "You could not hurt if you were careful."

Phra whispered a word to Harry.

"Yes," he replied. "Father, Phra and I want to go with Sree."

"It would be better for him to go alone."

"The young sahibs have been trained by me to be silent when seeking wild creatures in the jungle, Sahib. They could help us by taking the spears, if we get any, and laying them in the bottom of the boat."

"Why not take two of the boatmen?"

"His servant would rather trust the young sahibs," said Sree.

"There is no time to discuss the matter," said Mr. Kenyon firmly. "Be careful, boys, and go."

Harry's heart gave a big throb, and he gripped Phra's knee.

"Ah," whispered the latter; "this is what I wanted. It is doing something to help."

"Yes," whispered back Harry. "It is horrible sitting here doing nothing but talk."

Even in those brief moments something had been done; the boat had been set in motion, and now glided with the stream from beneath the bamboo platform out at the upper end.

Then at a word the boatmen followed the two gentlemen and Mike out on to the platform, and squatted down at once; Adong and Lahn seized oars, passing the cocoa-nut fibre loops over the posts which served as rowlocks, and, with the boys' hearts beating high with excitement, the boat began to glide rapidly and silently upstream with the tide.

CHAPTER XXIII THE SPEAR HARVEST

THE distance was short, and to favour the daring enterprise, the darkness seemed to grow more intense as morning drew near. The banks of the river were invisible as they glided silently along, and the boys were whispering together when Sree suddenly stepped to where they sat amidships.

"We speak not when near the tiger's lair," he said softly. "When we go alongside the boat I pick, I shall hold on, Adong and Lahn will go on board; you two will silently take the spears and lay them along the thwarts."

"Yes," said Phra, and the old hunter passed on, bare-footed, forward to where Adong was wielding his oar.

The two comrades sat straining their eyes, for the barges, they felt certain, were not far ahead, and wondered whether the two boys, as they called them—though they were full-grown men—would succeed in the daring venture; and it was on Harry's tongue to whisper,—

"Oh, I wish we had made Sree send us instead."

It was only a momentary thought, before he felt that the two dark, nearly-naked Siamese, as strong, active and silent in their movements as leopards, from long training as hunters, were far better adapted for the task; and he had nearly come to this conclusion when a low muttering reached his ears, and looking to his left, he could just make out something dark which he knew to be one of the barges anchored almost in mid-stream.

The next minute he caught sight of the dim glow of a paper anthorn, and that was on the prow of another barge close in to

the palace landing-place ; but the boat still glided on, for the keen, owl-like eyes of Adong had seen another of the barges a little ahead.

All was wonderfully still, but there was a dull, indescribable murmur in the air which told of sleeping men being near at hand, and a faint, human odour reached Harry's nostrils which endorsed the fact.

But he had no time for thinking : the movements of the three Siamese hunters were so rapid. The next minute they were close up to the last barge seen, and the boat quivered a little as Sree made a movement which meant that he had reached over and caught the side.

So to speak, the boys listened with all their might, and their ears, made more sensitive by excitement, seemed to magnify sound, and their eyes to have increased power ; still the darkness was so intense that they could not see the actions of the men forward and astern.

But their sense of feeling had grown so acute that they were conscious of the fore part of the boat rising a little, and then of the hinder portion lifting, each time there being a light quivering and lapping of the water against the sides.

"They've got aboard her," thought Harry, whose mouth and throat grew dry. "The next thing will be spears indeed, but a shower sent at Adong and Lahn. Then they will leap overboard with a splash, Sree will push off, and the two boys will swim to us."

"Oh ! "

It was a mental ejaculation, and the boy's thoughts formed this question,—

"Will they think to swim with the tide, for we shall float upstream ? "

A faint click as of wood against wood interrupted his musings, and then he started, for Phra pinched his leg, the compression of the flesh being painful from the excitement of the giver.

Harry responded with another pinch, which to his credit was of a much milder form, and then all was still, while the boys waited on the *qui vive* for what seemed fully five minutes.

All was perfectly still, and Harry strained his eyes so as to make out Sree holding the boat alongside in a position which enabled him to keep it steady, while at the same time he was ready to thrust it right away into comparative, though not perfect, safety, for a well thrown bamboo-hafted spear flies far and with deadly power.

"There are none, or they can't find them," thought Harry, but the next moment the bamboo shaft of a spear touched his shoulder, the man who handed it being careful to pass the butt end of the weapon first, and quick as lightning the boy received it and laid it down behind him, reaching up his hands again to feel for another, and becoming conscious at the same moment that Phra was stooping to lay down one he had received.

It was not easy to feel the weapons in the dark, but they felt for and received two each, and then there was a pause, while they listened to the *murmur, murmur* from one of the other great boats, which sounded as if some one was relating a long story in a low tone.

Then two more spears were passed down, and two more, it being hard work to lay them alongside the thwarts without making them rattle ; and again there was a pause for what seemed to the boys fully ten minutes, before they heard a low, rattling sound, as if several of the bamboo shafts had been laid together against the rail of the barge, and the murmur ceased.

Harry held up his hands for another spear, but he reached about in vain. There was no response till the murmur recommenced, when there was another rattle, louder than the first, and again the murmur ceased.

But now the butts of two spears touched Harry in the chest, and he seized and laid them down, finding two more waiting.

These he grasped and laid down. Then two more, which he also seized, thus taking possession of six in less than a minute ; a dull rattling in front telling that Phra was as busily employed, though how many he had obtained it was impossible to tell.

The murmur of voices began again, but the two men did not make any sign of returning, and the boys waited with beating hearts, but waited in vain.

They raised their hands and felt about overhead, but nothing more was handed to them, and the desire was strong upon Harry to creep to where Sree was holding the boat close against the barge's side, and ask him what he thought ; but the feeling that the old hunter was in command, and that the two boys might be only obeying their master's orders, stayed him, and he waited.

"Here they are" he thought at last, for there was a movement high up on the side of the barge.

He raised his hand again, and as he did so he felt a sharp jerk in the sleeve of his jacket and starting back he knew instinctively that the blade of a spear had been sharply thrust down instead of the butt, and had passed through his jacket, grazing his arm, while the jerk he gave held the blade entangled lightly between his arm and side.

"What does he mean by that?" thought the boy as he was dragged forward and nearly off his feet, for he had seized the shaft with both hands.

He knew the next moment, for there was a loud shout, the sound of a blow ; the spear came free, and something heavy and soft drove him backwards, while a sudden jerking of the boat brought Phra to his knees.

The shouting increased, and was responded to from barge after barge, the alarm having spread ; but the boat was rapidly gliding across the river, and, turning at the opposite side, began to descend

again at a pretty good rate, while a couple of lanthorns could be seen moving about on the barge they had left, and others were being lit as fast as was possible—slowly enough—on the others.

It was still too dark to make out what was taking place in their own boat, but it seemed to Harry in the excitement and confusion that only one of the men had dropped in and was rowing forward, while Sree was working the after oar, but with danger so near, he dared not even whisper to Phra, who was close by. Another thing was that he was trying to draw the spear from his left sleeve, in which it was strangely tangled, as if the man who thrust had given it a twist; and, worse still, he had become conscious that his arm and sleeve were wet, a peculiar smarting sensation telling him that he was bleeding freely.

"At last!" he said to himself, as he tore out the spear; and then he started, for Sree was leaning over him.

"Adong—Lahn?" whispered Harry.

"Both here, Sahib. Are you hurt?"

"I don't know. Yes—a little."

"Put your hand on the place," said Sree.

Harry obeyed, and the next moment a broad band was tightening over it.

"Now slip your hand away," whispered Sree.

Harry obeyed, and the band was drawn tighter and something wrapped round again and again before it was tied.

"Don't talk," whispered Sree; "they will follow us, and I must row."

He went aft, and put out another oar, helping to send the boat more rapidly along; and it was necessary, for before they had gone much farther, the boys could make out that many more lanthorns had been lit, and a couple of barges were beginning to move, one going up stream, the other coming down after them.

But the boat was going very fast now, and not many minutes had elapsed before they were abreast of the garden, and Sree was guiding the craft towards the landing-place.

"Are you hurt much?" whispered Phra.

"A nasty cut, that's all," was the reply. "Some one stabbed at me with a spear, and I thought it was only one being handed down. Never mind; we've got what we went for. Here, what's the matter?"

For Phra had drawn his breath as if in pain.

"Nothing much, only that man Adong fell down on me and hurt my back against the seat. Doesn't matter; soon be better. But you—does it bleed much?"

"Oh no; it's only like having a big finger cut instead of a little one. I say, do you think they'll find us out here?"

"No; they won't think we should hide so close. If they do, we must use the guns."

"Well, what success?" whispered Mr. Kenyon.

"Got the spears, father," said Harry, with forced gaiety, "but they heard us at last, and one of the barges is coming after us."

"Hist!" whispered Sree. "All get in now."

Long before the pursuing barge came abreast the party were all lying snugly beneath the landing-stage, and preparations for defence were made, the English and Sree with their guns ready to repel and attack, and the boatmen provided with the keenly-pointed spears.

There were breathless moments as the lanthorn-hung barge came steadily along, and every one expected that the crew would turn aside; but there was no check to the rowing, and the fugitives were able to breathe more freely as the lanthorns grew more faint, when the first words said were by Phra,—words which sent a thrill of horror through Mr. Kenyon, for Phra said in a hurried, excited manner:

"Here, Doctor, you must see to Harry: he is wounded."

"Only—a scratch," said the lad in a strange voice, and then he fell over sidewise.

The shock had been greater than he himself believed, for he had fainted away.

CHAPTER XXIV THE HELP SEEKER

DOCTOR CAMERON satisfied himself that the wound was not bleeding, and a little sprinkling with cold water soon brought the sufferer to, but nothing more could be done till daylight lit up their refuge.

Meanwhile they waited anxiously, and ready to sell their lives dearly should they be attacked by the returning barge, Sree having given his opinion that their pursuers would not go very far.

He was quite right, for before half an hour had passed the sound of oars came over the water with what seemed to be a regular throb, which grew more distinct as the minutes passed away.

And now, to hide the clean, superior aspect of the boat, three or four of the mats, which had been taken down, were roughly torn and damaged, after which they were hung clumsily from the bamboos overhead, the lower part trailing in the water, so that, in addition to the damaged look they gave the boat, they formed a shelter behind which the party waited, weapon in hand.

Faint signs of the coming day were visible, and the notes of birds could be heard; but it was still dark enough to help their concealment, for the stars were shining faintly when the barge came in sight and swept by without its occupants noticing the boat in its tiny harbour.

But no one stirred till the barge had passed quite out of sight, and then as the daylight rapidly broadened, Doctor Cameron

helped his patient to the stern of the boat, and, with Mr. Kenyon and Phra looking on, drew off the boy's jacket and proceeded to examine the wound.

"Only a slight, clean cut, Hal, my boy," he said, as he tore up a handkerchief for a bandage, and bound the wound. "It bled freely, but the edges are well together, and it will rapidly heal. How was it?"

Harry explained, watching the doctor the while, as he drew out his pocket-book, took needle and silk from within, and neatly sewed up the end of the bandage.

"Lucky for you it did not strike you in the chest. There; to-morrow or next day I will put on a little strapping. You need not even carry your arm in a sling."

Mr. Kenyon sighed with relief, and then proceeded with the others to examine the weapons Adong and Lahn had handed down from the barge before they were heard and had to make their escape.

And now it was seen that the pair had done more than merely obtain the spears, for as they rose from the bottom of the boat and stood stooping in the light which streamed clearer and clearer through every opening, they proudly showed that their lingouties, or waistbands, were stuck full, back and front, of the kries or native daggers in their wooden sheaths.

"Capital!" cried Mr. Kenyon, and the two men's eyes flashed with pride at the words of praise bestowed upon them. Even the doctor looked less sombre, and took eager interest in the process of arming their followers, the kries being handed round, and each man apportioned one of the spears, which were now laid neatly along the thwarts of the boat on either side, ready for use.

Fortunately there was a sufficiency of food left in the boat to last for a couple of days or more, for it had been well provisioned at starting, so that there was no need to attempt any search for more, and Harry drew Sree's attention to the fact that the fishing bamboos and lines were still untouched where they had been placed across the bamboo rafters. But it was a day of agony for those who had so much at stake.

Mr. Kenyon refused to look at the ruins of his home, but Harry could not resist the temptation to creep out on to the bamboo floor and then crawl a short distance up the garden, keeping well in shelter among the bushes till he could see all that was left of the charming, well-tended home.

"And all the beautiful specimens gone!" he sighed.

"Yes, sir, and all my clothes and treasures in my pantry," said a familiar voice.

"You here, Mike!" said Harry, starting.

"Yes, sir; the master said I might crawl after you to have a look. Oh dear, dear! burnt to ashes! Why didn't they build the place of stone instead of wood?"

"I don't know, Mike. I was too little to have any voice in the matter."

"Yes, sir, you was, and precious little too ; but oh dear, oh dear ! I'm a ruined man. Think it would be safe to go to the tool shed and get a shovel ? I see it ain't burnt."

"No ; we must not risk being seen. But what do you want to do ?"

"Try and find something among the ashes where my pantry was, sir."

"No, you must not go now. What is it you want to search for ?"

"Honour bright, sir ? You won't go along with Mr. Phra and dig for it yourself ?"

"Dig for it ! Is it likely ? What is it ?"

"That little old Chinee teapot o' mine as stood on the shelf."

"What, that old bit of rubbish, Mike ! Why, both the spout and handle were knocked off."

"That's so, sir," said Mike, with a queer look ; "but the lid was all right."

"Pooh ! I could buy you a better one for——"

"No, you couldn't, Master Harry, because you see there's no chance for spending such money here, so I saved a bit."

"Saved a bit ?" said Harry.

"Yes, sir ; there was just a hundred and one silver Chinese dollars in that teapot. Now do you understand ?"

"Yes, Mike, I understand," said the boy sadly. "But never mind ; they'll be safe enough till we've got the mastery over these wretches."

"Don't think they'll all ha' melted away, do you, sir ?"

"They may have melted, Mike, but not away. Perhaps they'll have all run down into the shape of the bottom of the teapot ; but if they have, the silver will be worth the money."

"Oh, come, sir ; there's some comfort in that. I say, Master Harry, are we going to have to fight ?"

"I think we are sure to, Mike."

"Well, I s'pose I am a coward now, sir. I used to be a bit of a dab with my fists when I was your age ; not as I was over fond of it ; but I've never killed anybody, and I'd rather clean the guns any day than shoot men with 'em. But after hearing all I have, and after seeing what they'll do with spears—for it wasn't that chap's fault that he didn't send that spear through you instead of your arm—and what with the business last night, and the doctor's trouble, and now seeing our house and my pantry turned into just a heap of ashes, it's a bit too much. It makes me want to fight, sir ; and if there is any going on, I will."

"That's right, Mike. You will stand by us then ?"

"That I will, Master Harry," said the man, with the tears in his eyes. "I aren't been all I should ha' been as your father's

servant, but I am a man, sir, and an Englishman, and Englishmen must stick together out in foreign parts like this."

"They must indeed, Mike."

"Then I'll be close at your back, Master Harry, wherever you go ; and if I gets killed, well, I do, sir, and I leave you all the silver in that old pot."

"*Phee—ew !*"

"Quick ! let's get back," whispered Harry, giving the man a grateful look, and hiding a disposition to laugh ; "that was Sree whistled. Some one must be coming along the river."

The warning was repeated softly before they reached the landing-place.

"Quick, quick !" said Mr. Kenyon, in a loud whisper, and they had only just time to creep down into the shelter when half a dozen large boats were seen coming up the river, each filled with men, whose spear-points glittered in the sunshine ; and once more all crouched in readiness to defend their little stronghold, should the boat attract the attention of the enemy as they passed by.

But the boats passed on, following in each other's wake, the occupants being too much taken up by the sounds which suddenly arose from the direction of the palace ; for just as the first boat was nearly abreast of the landing-stage the sharp reports of guns told that a fresh attack was being made upon it, the first discharges producing a strange excitement amongst the enemy, who began rowing with all their might, so that they soon passed, but without giving much relief to those who watched, for the firing increased, and it was evident that a desperate attack was going on.

Then the firing ceased as suddenly as it had begun, leaving the listeners in a frightful state of doubt.

For the cessation might just as probably mean that the enemy had forced their way in as that they had been beaten off ; and as the silence continued for quite an hour, Harry and Phra moved so as to be close to the doctor, and then gently take his hand.

The sound of firing, when every shot may mean the death of a fellow creature, is a strange reviver of hope—a peculiar comforter ; but when at the end of that weary hour the firing began again, both Phra and the doctor started up with their faces flushed with eager excitement, and Harry felt ready to shout.

"They're not beaten," he said proudly. "The King's too strong, and he drives the wretches back every time. Why, father, when we get to them to-night, they will all be in such good spirits that it will be dangerous for the enemy to show themselves again."

"We must be thinking about our attack, Sree," said Mr. Kenyon, without making any reply to his son's outburst.

"I am going as soon as it grows dark, Sahib. There is not much to do. A little brown earth to moisten and rub over your hands, arms, and faces."

"Yes, yes, that is easy enough ; anything will do as it is night ; even gunpowder could be used. But the garments ? it is of them that I was thinking."

"The sahibs will have to use those of the common people, and so many are away from their boats that it will not be long before I can get padungs enough. Those are all that you will need, and be the best things to hide you ; for no one would think that you could be sahibs, dressed like that."

The rest of the day went sluggishly by, with total cessations of the firing filling the listeners with despair and hope returning whenever it was resumed.

At last, after many alarms from passing boats, the sun sank low, and the question of sending off a message to some English vessel in the port had to be decided for Mr. Kenyon had pencilled a few lines containing an urgent appeal for help from any captain into whose hands it might fall, begging that he would at once set sail for the nearest port where a British man-of-war might be found—Hong-Kong or Singapore—and lay before the authorities the critical position in which the tiny English colony was placed, and imploring that steps might be at once taken for their rescue.

To deliver this note, a trusty messenger was needed, and a boat.

And now there was a feeling of bitter regret that the sampan in which Adong had followed them up the river had been abandoned from the hour the man came on board as being a useless appendage at such a time of peril. But Sree declared that there would be no difficulty in finding one after dark, so part of the trouble was at an end.

The question then arose as to who should be the messenger, and Sree now proposed Adong.

He would soon find a boat, Sree said, but he thought that some one should accompany him, and that some one should be Sahib Harry.

"I couldn't go," said Harry hastily. "I must stay to help here."

"But the young Sahib is wounded ; and if he took the letter with Adong, he would be safe."

"I don't want to be safe like that," said Harry hastily. "I can't go, father ; I must stay with you."

"But it is most important that the letter should be placed in some Englishman's hands," said Mr. Kenyon ; "and Sree is right, my boy ; you would be safe."

"Oh no, father," cried the boy excitedly ; "there would be as much risk in sending me there as in letting me stay. I may be of some help here ; and, besides, I couldn't go and leave you."

Mr. Kenyon gave way. The paper was rolled up small, a bamboo was cut, and into one of its hollows the paper was thrust, and then the place was plugged so that it was water-tight, in case the messenger had to swim. Lastly, armed with a kris in his waist-band,

and with one of the spears, Adong, who fully appreciated the importance of his mission, proudly took his departure, going off through the garden ; for, as Sree said, no one was likely to interfere with such a man as he at a time like that.

The little party breathed more freely when the man had gone, for it was like the first step towards a rescue ; but in a few minutes there was a short, earnest conversation with Sree as to how his man would manage.

"He will journey down the river till he sees a boat that he can take, and then go on, lying up close to the shore when there is danger, and going on down again towards the sea."

This decided, the perilous enterprise of joining with some portion of the attacking force was discussed in what was really a little council of war ; and it was determined that Sree should assume the character of leader, with Phra as his lieutenant, the rest being followers. How and where they were to join the enemy must, it was agreed, depend upon circumstances.

The men were eager to a degree, declaring themselves ready to die so that they might save the King ; and as soon as it was quite dark the well-armed party quitted their cramping position in the boat to assemble in the forlorn and deserted garden, the boat being well secured, and left as a place of *rendezvous* in case of fortune being against them, and as a means of escape in dire peril. Then Sree went away for an hour, and returned, declaring the time had come.

In the few words which passed in whispers as they made for the gateway opening on the riverside track leading to the rest of the English bungalows, and beyond that to the palace, it was quite decided that they had nothing to fear in marching boldly onward through the darkness, for their appearance as so many well-armed men going to join in the attack would be quite natural, the second king's army consisting as it did merely of an armed rabble, with which some of the King's half-drilled guards were mixed after they had deserted him in his peril.

Of all this Sree in his efforts to spy out the state of affairs had thoroughly convinced himself ; the great danger was that Phra or the gentlemen might excite suspicion ; but the efforts to disguise them had been most successful, the simplicity of their garb and the coloured skins promising in the darkness and confusion to be enough.

Then a few words were addressed by the old hunter to the men, and the adventurers moved out of the gateway, and with beating hearts made for the lights whose reflections could be seen above and through the trees.

CHAPTER XXV

A DESPERATE VENTURE

IT was an exciting tramp, but those most concerned in the success marched on with such a display of eagerness as sent a thrill of confidence through Harry, who, for the first part of their little journey, walked beside Phra, the boys talking in whispers about what would probably be done.

"It seems very horrid," whispered Harry. "Why, when we go up to the attack, we shall be longing to stick our spears into the wretches who are about us, and all the time we shall have to seem like friends."

"You will not be able to do anything but carry your spear over your shoulder," replied Phra.

"Shan't I? You'll see. My arm doesn't hurt much now; and if we get fighting, I believe that I shall not feel it at all. Oh, Phra, how I do long to begin! It's the thinking about it all and the waiting that is the worst."

"Talk in a lower tone," said Mr. Kenyon in a whisper; "and as soon as we hear the enemy be silent."

Phra kept by his comrade's side, and twice over, when voices were heard in front, Sree halted his party, a low, snake-like hiss being the agreed signal.

To the great satisfaction of all, the voices came from a couple of parties, apparently, as far as could be made out in the darkness, similar in numbers to their own, and moving in the direction of the palace.

Encouraged by this, Sree went on more boldly, and they soon found that the very daring of their enterprise would prove their safety, the attacking force being made up of groups all strange to one another, their only bond being that they were bent on the same errand—the destruction of the palace and overthrow of the King's power, with the massacre of the whites.

In fact, as during one halt Sree told Mr. Kenyon, it would be quite possible to join on to any party they liked, their presence showing to the strangers that they were on the same side, and consequently, for the time being, friends.

"We can go where we like now, sahibs," said Sree; "and all you have to do is to keep away from any of the lights."

Consequently the need for caution was at an end, and, after a short consultation with Phra, Sree determined to go right round to the back of the palace, where he proposed that they should scale the outer wall, cross the garden, and then make for the inner wall near the elephant house, where the great gates were with their sculptured figures.

Increasing their pace now, they passed through several groups numbering hundreds; the people, who were non-combatants,

gathered in the hope of plunder, giving way at once at the bold advance of the little band of spearmen, and following at a distance for some hundreds of yards before halting, for there in front were the outer walls.

Before they reached these, as they loomed up in the darkness, the gloom was cut in many directions by flashes of light, and there was once more the loud, sputtering fire of the defenders, who were still safe and keeping their enemies at bay.

The firing seemed to inspire the little party with renewed eagerness, and at a word from Sree they broke into a trot, following an avenue of palms which led right up to the wall, where there was a little, strongly-made gate.

Before reaching it, Sree called a halt, and there was a short debate.

"The enemy must have broken open the gate," Phra whispered; "and they are in the gardens."

"Never mind," said Sree; "we must go on and try to get to the Great Elephant gates."

The next minute they found that they were wrong, for the little doorway in the stone wall was fast, but directly after they found that a couple of roughly-made bamboo ladders had been tied and placed against the wall, up one of which Sree crept, Phra mounting the other, followed by Harry, while Mr. Kenyon and the doctor followed Sree.

Then the first check came. There was a sharp movement, the staves of spears rattled on the other side, and a voice challenged them with the question where they were going.

"To help take the palace, of course," said Sree sharply.

There was a laugh.

"Over with you, then," said the man who challenged; "but you will not all come back."

Sree made a show of hesitating.

"What, is it a hard fight?" he said.

"Yes; hundreds have been shot down as fast as they tried to climb the gates. What! Are you afraid?"

"Afraid? No," said Sree, seating himself on the top of the wall.

The man laughed again, and his laugh was echoed by what sounded like a score of companions.

"There, don't shirk it," said the man in command. "You must take your chance, and there'll be plenty of loot for those who are first in."

"Then why don't you go?" growled Sree.

"Because we're ordered to stop here by our leader. Come, over with you."

Sree hesitated for a moment or two.

"They can't see to shoot in the dark," he said; and calling on his party to follow, he hurried down the ladder on the other side, followed by the rest, and receiving an encouraging cheer from the

enemy. Phra stepped to Sree's side and guided the party by the most direct path towards the gates they sought.

Naturally it was familiar enough to Harry, but it seemed strange and terrible as they approached the great bronze gates behind which a little party of their friends had evidently entrenched themselves and kept up a fire whenever a party of the enemy dashed up to thrust with their spears through the open work of the barrier.

Harry had instant warning of the danger of their position in the bullets which came whistling by, but a word of warning from Sree made the new-comers strike off to the left, where they were out of the line of fire ; while now the boy made out, more by the murmuring of voices than by the eye, that the rebels, in two strong bodies, had grouped themselves on either side of the opening for safety, and from one or the other of these a little party kept on dashing up to the front, shouting defiance and trying to alarm the defenders in the hope of driving them back, so that the gates might be climbed.

This was evidently the principle upon which the attack had been carried on—a desultory, useless plan so long as the defenders stood firm. In fact, there was no discipline, no cohesion in the attacking force, no mutual dependence ; merely the hand-to-hand fighting of a barbarous people, and the result could be heard in the many sighs and groans which came from where the wounded had been carried or had dragged themselves out of the line of fire.

There was the humming crowd in the darkness just in front, and a few steps would have taken Mr. Kenyon's party right amongst them ; but no one heeded the new-comers, and once more the leaders drew together to consult.

"We can do nothing here," whispered Phra. "If we were not shot down by our friends, we could not sham dead. Look there, we should be seen."

For now there was a flash of light, and a blazing mass of fire, somewhat after the fashion of a blue light, came flying over the gate, to fall twenty yards outside, and throw up the swarthy bodies of the enemy like so many dark silhouettes, while a rapid burst of shots told the reason for the light, several men having afforded good aim to the defenders, and half a dozen dropping amidst groans and howls of rage.

"Yes, it is impossible," whispered Mr. Kenyon in Siamese. "Is there no place where we could climb this wall ? "

There was no reply for some moments, during which the blue light began to burn out, and a man darted forward to trample upon it, but to his cost, for two shots were fired, and in the expiring, pallid glare the man was seen to stagger a few paces and then fall.

A roar of rage followed this proof of the defenders' marksmanship, and another rush was made at the gate by the maddened enemy, not in obedience to any order, but every man acting upon his own impulse ; and amidst the roar of voices, the clattering of spears

against the bronze ornamentation, and the firing of the defenders, Sree uttered his low hiss, and led the way with Phra away to the left, the latter plunging directly after into a secluded walk close to the wall, where all was completely deserted, and Harry felt that if they only had one of the bamboo ladders they had so lately used, it would be perfectly easy to climb up and drop within the palace courts.

Their evasion was either not heeded, or merely looked upon as part of an attempt to turn the defenders by means of a fresh attack ; so the little party crept silently along through the bushes which acted as a blind to this part of the wall, above which a portion of the palace rose.

A sudden thought struck Harry, and, with his spear sloped back over his shoulder, he pressed on quickly to the front.

"Phra," he whispered, as he reached his friend, "the big tree."

"Hist ! Yes."

In another minute they were all halted in the intense darkness close up to the trunk of a huge tree whose boughs spread horizontally in every direction, some overhanging the walls, a place familiar to Harry ; but as soon as he had realized Phra's intent he felt convinced that the defenders would have taken steps to do away with so vulnerable a part of their defence.

For here it was quite possible to climb up the dwarfed trunk, crawl along one of the enormous horizontal boughs, and drop down into the open space between the wall and the palace.

Phra had evidently the same idea ; but upon searching round a little, the bushes beneath rustling as he and Sree passed here and there, it was evident that no saw had been at work, and in a whisper Sree announced that he was going first to show the way.

"The bough will bend down at the far end," whispered Phra, "and it will not be so far to drop. Here, I will go first ; I can climb."

Amidst the almost breathless silence beneath the tree, Phra began to mount, and Harry whispered that he would come next, just as a fresh burst of firing, which sounded distant, arose.

"You cannot climb, Sahib," whispered Sree ; "your arm."

"I *will* climb," whispered back Harry. "Hold my spear."

He passed the weapon to the old hunter, and followed Phra right up to the fork, level with the top of the wall ; and by that time his comrade had nearly reached the wall, which was a couple of feet below the great bough, when there was a bright flash from a window, the crashing of a bullet through the branches of the tree, and almost simultaneously a loud report.

"Don't fire—don't fire ! Friends !" cried Mr. Kenyon ; but before the words had passed his lips there was another report.

"Who is it ?" came now.

"Kenyon, Cameron, and men to help," cried the doctor.

"How are we to know that ? Speak again."

"Up with you, and over!" cried Mr. Kenyon angrily. "We shall have the wretches round here directly. Quick, boys; get on, and drop!"

There was no further opposition; the English was unmistakable, and the two who had been at the window guarding the well-known weak spot, descended from the barricaded window to help the new-comers, welcoming each warmly as he descended.

It was close work though, for, hearing the firing, a party of the watchful enemy was attracted to the spot before all were over, the last man and Sree—who had stayed to see all in safety before he crossed the natural bridge—having to halt and engage in a sort of duel with spears in the darkness, when from their crippled position in the tree, matters would have gone ill with them but for the diversion made by the defenders, who fired a little volley from the window, which held the enemy in check till Sree was safe.

"What an escape!" whispered Harry, as he caught the old hunter's arm when he dropped into the narrow court.

"Yes, Sahib; they came very near to stopping me from joining you; but there, I'm used to such escapes. It is many times that I have been nearly killed. But now some of us must stop here to keep the enemies of the King away, for where we got over they will try to do the same."

It was felt that no better way of defending the spot could be adopted than that already in practice, and the two colonists, after warm congratulations had passed between them and their friends, returned to their position at the window, while Phra eagerly led his tiny reinforcement round to the little court by the Elephant Gates, where the small wing of the palace had been fortified as much as was possible, and was being held by the King.

CHAPTER XXVI FOR LIFE

IT is needless to try and describe the meeting between Doctor Cameron and his wife and friends, or that between Phra and his father, the King. They were brief enough, and at a time when any moment they might be called upon to take a final farewell, for the state of affairs was very desperate in the palace, whose defenders were getting worn out by the constantly recurring attacks. The coming then of the reinforcement, trifling as it seemed, was hailed with the most intense satisfaction, giving as it did fresh hope to the defenders when they were beginning to despair.

For the palace, with its extended walls, was too big for so small a garrison to defend.

In all there were not more than sixty people fit to bear arms, forty being the white colonists, the remaining twenty officers and nobles who had remained faithful to the King, and who had proved that they were ready to lay down their lives in his defence and that

of the ladies who had been brought into the palace when the revolution first broke out.

Ten minutes after the reinforcements had reached the group of defenders another attack was made ; and now from the interior the boys had a view of the way in which the enemy was made to suffer.

For the King had cast aside all his quiet, studious ways, and was fighting side by side with his defenders. It was he who had prepared the light grenades by mixing up certain proportions of nitre, sulphur, and antimony, ramming the powder into small vases, which one or other of the gentlemen lit, and then hurled over the gate, throwing the enemy into confusion and giving the little party of marksmen behind a barricade that had been thrown up, a good opportunity for inflicting loss upon the enemy who were thus time after time kept at bay and disheartened, when a combined attack must have been fatal to the defenders of the palace.

And now as the two boys watched the firing, they realized more fully how weak were the defences, and how easily the hundreds upon hundreds of rebels swarming outside might have carried them by a brave attack, when, unless they had been able to make a stand in the wing of the palace, the besieged must have been crushed by weight of numbers.

Harry had noticed this, inexperienced as he was ; but it was further impressed upon him by a whisper from Phra, who stood by him, double gun in hand.

"If their leader were to make one bold attack, Hal, we should be driven inside, and then I'm afraid it would be all over."

"There are a good many of them," said Harry evasively, "and it doesn't seem nice shooting at people as if they were tigers."

"They are tigers," said Phra fiercely. "They would kill us all."

"Then we must treat them as tigers," said Harry coolly, "and shoot all we can. Look here, the numbers are not so bad as they appear, because one Englishman is as good as ten such fighting men as these, to put it modestly ; and you and your father and some of these here are half English now ; so we're stronger than we seem. I say, I don't feel as if I want to know, it's so horrible ; but I feel as if I ought to."

"To know what ? "

"When the wretches burned the bungalow, did they——"

"Look out ! " panted Phra ; "they're coming on to break down the gates."

Phra was right, for by the light of the paper lanthorns, swinging on high at the tops of spears, a dense crowd of the enemy could be dimly seen surging up towards the opening with a dull, hoarse roar ; and a sharp order or two was given by some one who seemed to be in command.

There was an order too given on the defenders' side, and as the foe reached the gates and planted rough ladders there to climb up

—this being the first time they had been so daring in their attack, those before having been confined to thrusting and throwing spears —a single shot rang out, and then another. These were followed by a volley from about a dozen pieces, but the assailants were not checked. Several fell, but the others came on desperately, and in obedience to a word from Sree the spearmen just brought in marched forward to stand close behind the people firing, and about a dozen more drawn up by the palace joined them.

Crash !

Another volley, the bullets for the most part passing through the open work of the gates ; but still the enemy swarmed on.

Just then a dark figure ran back to where the boys stood, gun in hand, ready to fire.

“ Hal ! Phra ! ” was whispered hoarsely ; “ if they get through and we are driven back, don’t wait to resist, but rush into one of the rooms at once and fire through the open windows. We are all going to retreat there.”

“ Where is my father ? ” whispered Phra excitedly.

“ I don’t know ; I have not seen him for the last few minutes.”

“ Ah ! here he comes,” cried Phra.

“ Stand away, boy ! ” cried the King excitedly, as he ran down the steps from the palace entrance, bearing something in each hand spitting and sparkling like a firework.

Phra gave way at his father’s command, but rushed after him to be ready to defend him from injury ; and, as if from a natural instinct, Harry followed to defend his comrade, till they saw the King stop in front of the gates, over which many of the enemy were climbing, some to reach the ground unhurt, others to fall, shot down.

As the King stopped there seemed to be a sea of fire about his head, as he whirled one of the sparkling objects round ; then it passed from his hand, formed a tiny arc as it flew over the gate, and fell amongst the crowd beyond.

Another volley was fired now ; but hardly had the flashes of the pieces darted from the muzzles of the guns before the second fuze, sparkling brightly, flew from the King’s hand, forming another arc of scintillating light as it cleared the gates and would have fallen twenty feet or so beyond, but ere it reached the ground there was a blinding flash, a tremendous concussion, which drove the boys back, and a terrific roar.

For a few moments there was dead silence, and then from the spot where the first missile had fallen, apparently without effect, there was another roar, followed by a rush of feet, cries, and groans, while from within there were fierce yells and warlike shouts, mingled with the clashing of spears, as about twenty of the enemy, who had succeeded in getting over, made a rush.

They were met, though, by the spearmen who had formed up to defend the firing party, and a desperate conflict ensued, not a man surviving the fierce defenders now freshly come upon the scene.

A few groans, and the scuffling sound of men on the other side of the gate crawling or being helped away, was now all that could be heard save the peculiar murmur and tramp of the huge crowd of retiring men, startled and checked for the time being by the new weapons of defence which they had encountered for the first time.

It was a respite, and after leaving a sufficient guard at the gate and others on the wall, to give warning of another advance, the defenders crowded up to the terrace steps, all talking together and congratulating the King on what he had done.

"Go in, half of you at a time, gentlemen, and eat and drink. This has only checked them for the present."

"Oh, they won't come back to-night, sir, surely?" cried a voice Harry knew to be the doctor's, though it seemed strangely altered, so full was it of exultation now. "But what were they—shells?"

"Only a couple of canisters of powder," replied the King. "It was a thought I had. I made a hole in each, and thrust in a roll of touch-paper."

"But, my dear sir, suppose they had exploded before they left your hands?" cried the doctor excitedly.

"Ah, then," said the King quietly, "then, Doctor—yes, it would have been bad. I'm afraid I should have been beyond your power to cure. But you must be worn out, Doctor," he added; "pray go in and get some refreshments. You will find the ladies have everything ready in the lower room."

"Thanks, sir, no," said the doctor abruptly; "my mind's at rest now, and I want to work. Where are the wounded being placed?"

"In my son's rooms, Doctor. Thank you. You are right; but make some one bring you coffee and whatever you require."

"Oh, yes, sir, I'll take care," cried the doctor, and he hurried in, while the King turned to Mr. Kenyon.

"Ah, now I can speak with you, my friend," he said. "No, no, my boys, you need not go," he added, as Phra and Harry were drawing back. "It is sad work for you, but it is forced upon me. Now, Kenyon, you are fresh, and I want your advice; you know how difficult a place this is to defend. What do you say? Ought we not to retire into this part of the palace now and defend ourselves from there? I have had every window boarded up; we have plenty of ammunition, and the place is well provisioned. There is water too. What do you think?"

"I am not a soldier, sir," said Mr. Kenyon gravely.

"No, but you are my friend, and it is a relief to hear your voice. Speak."

"I may say things that you, sir, would not like."

"They will be the words of the man I have known and trusted these many years," said the King—"the man I trust to be a second father to my boy here if I fall."

"Then for his sake, sir, I should say—I do not know that I am right, but I speak as I think at the moment—would it not be better to seize the opportunity of retreating now that the enemy have been checked for the present?"

"No, Kenyon," said the King firmly; "I have thought of that, but everything is against it. I dislike this bloodshed, though the men who fall are my cruel enemies who are thirsting for our blood; but I am king here, and when I die, my son must be king in my place. I have done nothing but good for my people, and because they have been raised against me by treacherous foes, I will not be coward enough to go."

"Your situation is desperate, sir, and there are all my friends here, who, trusting to my advice and to your promises, are now in terrible peril."

"It is that, Kenyon, which makes me firmer and more determined to stay. Think, my friend; suppose I say we will retreat. There is the jungle, into which we must take the delicate women. There are elephants enough to bear them all. What about food, and how could we defend them there? We should all be killed."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon; "but the river?"

"The enemy is master there, and has all the boats. But even if we had two, we should be at a terrible disadvantage, and could only try to reach some foreign ship. But they would beat us there. No, we want strong walls to fight behind."

"You are right, sir," said Mr. Kenyon; "but I would not retreat inside after what has taken place to-night."

"We are wearied out with fighting," said the King sadly.

"But the enemy is dispirited to-night, and I venture to think that they will not attack again till morning. Better let us who have come freshly try to strengthen the defences by the gate."

"Nothing can be done there; better strengthen this part of the palace. There are weak places yet."

"Very well, sir; we will do that; and to-night we will watch while you and the others rest. It seems to me too that the powder canisters produced more effect than the firing of all our friends. Why should we not make a mine?"

"A mine? I do not understand."

"A hollow somewhere in front of the gate, say a dozen yards away; charge it with a small keg of powder, and I think I can contrive a plan for firing it by means of a wire laid underground. The keg, too, will be covered, and the enemy will not know. It would produce a terrible effect when they crowded up to the next attack. The idea is horrible, but it is in defence of all."

"It would be ten times as horrible for us to fall, and the poor women to be brutally massacred by these mad wretches. Can you do this, Kenyon?"

"I can, sir. I will do it in two places, so that if one fails the other will be sure."

"Hah!" ejaculated the King. "Kenyon, old friend, you make me feel strong again, and as if you and the boys have brought me hope in my hour of despair."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE POWDER MINE

"HAD a good sleep, Hal?"

Harry sat up with a sudden start from the cushioned seat upon which he had been lying in the open hall of the King's palace, to find the doctor grimly smiling down. His second glance was at a great, grotesque, bronze figure looming up over him, and his third at Phra, who was lying on his back with his lips apart, sleeping heavily.

"Have—have I been asleep?" he stammered.

"Fast as a top, boy."

"But—but I thought we were in the boat up in the jungle, and—"

"We're here in the palace instead. How's your arm?"

"My arm?" said Harry wonderingly; "I don't know."

"Not very bad, then, old fellow."

"Oh, I recollect now. Here, I'd no business to go to sleep. I ought to have been watching."

"No, you ought not; the King told me that he had sent you boys to lie down."

"Yes, of course, he did," said the lad excitedly; "but oh, what a shame for us to be sleeping here at such a time! I say, has there been any more fighting?"

"Not a bit. The ruffians were sickened by those two boxes of powder they had."

"Oh, I am glad. But I say, Doctor Cameron, how is your wife?"

"Quite well, Hal. She has gone to lie down for a good sleep."

"What, has she been up all night?"

"Yes, helping me with the wounded."

"Oh, what a good woman she is!" cried Harry enthusiastically.

"Right, Hal," cried the doctor merrily. "Bless her! she is."

"And I do feel such a lazy pig! You two hard at work all night, and I've been snoring here like old Phra."

"So as to be ready to work hard to-day. It's all right, my boy."

"I say, doctor, you do look well and jolly to-day; any one would think we were not in trouble," said Harry gravely.

"Trouble, boy? I feel as if there was no trouble in the world."

"Yes, I understand," said Harry slowly. "You must feel relieved to have got back to Mrs. Cameron and found her safe and well. But I say, do you think we can beat these wretches off?"

"Think? No. We are going to do it, my lad."

"So we are," cried Harry. "Here, let's wake up old lazy-bones."

Boys will be boys, thanks to the grand elasticity of their nature. Over night Harry had felt like a serious man, but the night's rest and the doctor's hopeful words made him feel as full of light-heartedness as if there were not an enemy within a thousand miles.

Catching up the first thing near, a peacock's feather from a huge bunch in a massive bronze vase, he went behind Phra's head and gently inserted the quill end between the sleeper's lips.

There was no response, so the act was repeated, and Phra's teeth closed with a snap on the quill, which Harry released. Then the boy's eyes opened, and he lay staring at the waving plume standing straight up above him, raised his hand, took hold of it, and gave it a tug, but it was fast. He gave it another tug, discovered that it was held in his teeth, and sat up facing the doctor.

"Did you do that?" he cried.

"I? No."

"Then it was one of Hal's childish games. Oh, there you are! Here: have I been asleep? Yes, father told me to lie down. Oh, tell me, has the enemy come on again?"

"No, it's all right, old chap. I say, aren't you hungry?"

"Hungry? No. Where is my father, Doctor?"

"I don't know; he was with me just now, looking at the wounded."

The colour came a little in Harry's cheeks, for the thought struck him that he had not asked after his own father.

"How are the wounded, Doctor?" said Phra.

"All doing well, my dear boy. Now then, shall I prescribe for you two?"

"No, no; we don't want anything," cried the boys in a breath.

"Yes, you do, both of you—washing. Go and tidy yourselves up, and by that time there will be a regular comfortable breakfast ready. The ladies and Mike have been busy this hour past. If we are to fight, we must eat."

The doctor walked away, and Phra turned to Harry.

"If we get over this trouble, Hal," he said solemnly, "I'll punch your head for playing me that stupid trick."

"Do, old chap—if you can," cried the boy; "but I say, is my face dirty?"

"Horribly. Is mine?"

"Well," said Harry, frowning and looking very serious, "one could hardly call it dirty, but there's a black smudge across one cheek, and a dab on your forehead, and three black finger marks on your nose."

"Nonsense!"

"Quite true, old chap. You must have been painting your face with your gunpowdery fingers."

"Come to my bedroom then, and let's have a good wash."

Harry followed willingly, for he felt as if the operation would be delightful, and the next minute they were in the young prince's thoroughly English-looking bedroom, though it did not look at its best, for the curtains had been dragged aside, heavy boards nailed across the lower part of the window like a breastwork, and a couple of stout mattresses fixed up within the boards to make them less vulnerable to bullet or spear. But the rest of the room was as it should be, and a quarter of an hour was pleasantly spent with soap, water, towels, and brushes.

"Hah!" ejaculated Harry at last; "that was a treat; but I should have liked a regular bath."

"Let's whip the rebels first," said Phra, who looked bright and refreshed. "Come and have breakfast."

He led the way to the handsome saloon where the table was spread, and Mike was busy arranging a few things and looking clean and smart—even to being fresh shaved—as if nothing were wrong.

But the boys only glanced at him, and were directly after being warmly greeted by plenty of familiar friends. For about half the white defenders were gathered there, while the other half were on guard keeping careful watch. There was not a single enemy to be seen, though Sree and two men who had been scouting at daybreak had returned to announce that there were a great many of the rebels in hiding among the bushes and trees just beyond the outer wall, especially outside the grounds, as if to take care that no one should escape from the palace, where they were hemmed in.

A minute later the King came in with about half a dozen of the faithful officials, Mr. Kenyon, and the doctor.

His Majesty smilingly greeted all his white friends, and crossed then to the boys, with whom he shook hands warmly, after which the excellent breakfast was discussed, during which the King turned to Mr. Kenyon.

"We could not fare like this, my friend," he said, "if we took to the jungle or a boat."

"No, sir, no," replied Mr. Kenyon quickly. "I spoke last night on the impulse of the moment, but I have since thought that my idea was impracticable. I've been all about this wing of the palace too this morning, and I feel satisfied that we can hold it as long as we like if we do a little more to the defences. I'll talk with you, though, after breakfast."

The change from the hopeless despair of the past night was strange, and before long the two boys began to long for an opportunity to leave the table, for the disposition among their friends whom they had rejoined seemed to be one of crediting them with completely altering the state of affairs and making them the heroes of the hour.

At last the opportunity came, for the King rose, and those who had breakfasted hurried away to take the places of the guard.

"Let's slip out this way," said Harry, "or we shall meet the others as they come in, and I'm sick of it. Such rubbish ! Why, it was all father, Sree, and you."

"Old Sree deserves pretty well all the credit," agreed Phra. "Let's go and see where he is."

They soon found him and Lahn on their way back from the gate, and hurried them in to where Mike had a second breakfast waiting, the old hunter smiling with content at the genuine eagerness the two lads displayed in regard to his comfort.

But before they had been there long Mike hurried in from attending on the second party at the King's table, to see that his native friends, as he called them, were all right.

"Of course we shall beat the enemy, Master Harry," he said ; "but I had a look out from the top of the palace as soon as the sun rose, and you could see hundreds of thousands of them down by the river."

"Millions, Mike," cried Harry.

"Ah, you may laugh, sir, but there's an awful lot. Seems too many for us to beat, but we've got to do it, I suppose."

"Yes," said Sree, smiling, "we have got to beat them ; but they will not come on all at once."

"How many shots did you fire last night, Mike ?" said Harry banteringly.

"I didn't count, sir," said the man quietly ; "you see, I got so excited. Didn't feel half so scared as I thought I should. Hands trembled a bit first time I pulled the trigger, but they didn't afterwards. I suppose I was too busy."

"Didn't you count your cartridges ?"

"No, sir. I took a belt full, and some in my pockets."

"And how many did you bring back ?" asked Phra.

"None at all, sir."

"Michael was between Lahn and the sahibs," said Sree quietly, "and I hope he will fight by our sides the next time the enemy come on. I like to be fighting with a brave Englishman at my side."

"Yes, sir ; coming, sir," cried Mike, and he ran out of the room, with a very red face.

"Did any one call ?" said Phra.

"No, it was his gammon, so as to get away," said Harry. "I say, Sree, no nonsense. Old Mike didn't fight like that, did he ?"

"Oh, yes, Sahib ; no one could have been more brave and cool. I did not expect it. I always thought he was what you English people call a coward."

"I say, Phra, what a shame to laugh at him like that !"

"Yes, but you began it."

"Oh, that I didn't," cried Harry. "Never mind, we'll go halves ; I'll take my share of the blame."

"Are you lads in there ?" cried Mr. Kenyon.

"Yes, father," cried Harry.

" You may as well come with me. Ah, Sree, meet me in half an hour's time by the great gates ; bring the men who came with us, and we shall want spears."

" Yes, Sahib," said Sree, rising.

" No, no ; finish your meal first, my man. There is plenty of time."

The King, with several of his followers, was in the great hall ; and after Mr. Kenyon had gone round with the party to the several windows to see what more could be done by way of strengthening them and making more loop-holes for firing from, they were led to the vault-like arrangement beneath, where, dimly lit by slits in the thick wall, the ammunition stored up lay ready to hand.

Everything was in good order, and in addition to chests of cartridges—an ample supply—there were two perfectly new stands of rifles, with bayonets attached, while the other end was stacked with provisions, barrels of flour, boxes of biscuits, chests of tea, and bags of coffee and sugar—an ample store, the water supply being furnished from a spigot fitted to a bamboo pipe connected with a reservoir right away in the higher part of the grounds.

Two small kegs of gunpowder were carried up into the hall, Mr. Kenyon taking up one and the King the other ; but in an instant Harry had relieved his father of his load, and Phra had taken the King's.

These being placed ready by the door opening on to the steps, the party, at Mr. Kenyon's request, ascended to the roof, where Harry's father explained his wishes ; namely, that an ample supply of food, water, and ammunition should be brought up there ready for use, if at the last they were driven from the ground floor to the rooms above, and from there to taking refuge on the top, each floor forming a stronghold.

" And if it comes to the worst, Kenyon," said the King gravely—

" If it comes to the worst, sir," replied Mr. Kenyon solemnly, " we must not let ourselves and those we love fall into the hands of these wretches."

" No," said the King, with his eyes flashing. " What would you do ? "

" I propose, sir," said Mr. Kenyon, " that a sufficiency of the powder be placed ready below, and with that I shall make an arrangement through which, on the firing of a gun by means of a wire brought up here, the place can be blown up, and our enemies perish with us."

" Yes," said the King. " Good."

Harry and Phra exchanged glances, and then they shuddered. Sree was waiting with the men when they descended to the terrace, where, refreshed by their meal, the second party had assembled, ready for anything that might happen that day ; eager also to see what Mr. Kenyon and the doctor would suggest.

The first thing done was to send scouts once more to try and find out whether an advance was being prepared. While they were

absent, Mr. Kenyon, after explaining to the King his plans, asked for the gates to be opened, so that he and his men could pass out with an advance guard of about twenty, to screen as well as protect them while the mine was prepared.

The distance was so short that there was no scruple about the gates being unclosed, though both Harry and Phra looked upon the posting of the guard across the pathway outside the defences as being like a defiance and invitation to the enemy in one, and Harry told his father their thoughts.

"Exactly what I thought myself, Hal, but it must be done ; and what I hope they will think is that we have become emboldened by the defeat we gave them last night, and have advanced to meet them in fair fight outside."

"They will be watching, of course," said Phra.

"Yes, and that is why I have placed the men to cover us. No more words. Now to get the mines made as quickly as possible."

There was this difficulty in making the mines : to be effective, it was necessary that they should be as near the gates as possible, for there the greater part of the enemy would crowd to the attack ; but if they were too close, they might blow down the defences and inflict injury upon their friends ; while if they were too far off, they would be ineffective from the attacking party being few.

The only thing to be done was to choose the medium way, and the men were set to work to dig two small, deep holes, each capable of holding one of the powder kegs, and in each case the head was taken out before it was laid upon its side. But previously a narrow trench of about a foot in depth was dug, leading from the head of the cask right in through the gates. This finished, stout matting was laid over the keg and a loaded gun placed in the trench, already cocked, so that when the trigger was pulled by means of a wire, the flash from the gun would explode the powder. Then the wire was run through a number of large bamboos such as were used—after boring through the divisions—for water, and these were laid along the trench and through the gateway.

The result of this was that when the wire was pulled it would run easily and not be checked by the earth with which the trench was again to be filled, so that, the wire being attached to the trigger of the gun, the mine could be sprung in safety by those within the gates.

The preparations took some time, the arrangement of the bamboos causing a good deal of trouble. But all this was satisfactorily overcome at last, the trenches filled and trampled down so as not to betray the danger ; the kegs were covered in as well, the ground levelled, and dust and stones thrown over. Nothing remained to be done but to attach the wires to the triggers, lay boards over the guns from beneath the matting which covered the powder to the bamboos, and then fill in and level over the boards.

"Who is going to do this, father?" said Harry, who had stood by looking on all through.

"Do what?"

"Fasten the wires to the triggers."

"I am, my boy," said Mr. Kenyon, through his teeth.

"But suppose the guns went off?"

"I am going to provide against that," said Mr. Kenyon firmly, and he ordered the men who formed the screen and guard to advance fifty paces towards the enemy and away from the mines.

"But it will be very dangerous, father."

"Very, Hal; and I want careful guard to be kept over the ends of the wires within the gates, so that they shall not be touched. You and Phra had better take that duty."

"No, don't send me to do that, father," said Harry in rather a husky tone of voice. "I want to stay and help you."

"No one can help me, Hal; no one can do this but myself."

"But, father," whispered the boy, in agonized tones, "suppose—"

"I will suppose nothing, Hal," said Mr. Kenyon sternly. "It is very dangerous work, and I dare trust no one but myself. Now obey me, and remember that my life is in you boys' hands. No one must touch the end of those wires. Phra, you hear?"

"Yes, Mr. Kenyon, but I feel like Hal. We don't like to leave you."

"I am going to help the Sahib," said Sree quietly from where he stood, spade in hand.

"No, Sree; the task is too dangerous. Go with my son."

"The Sahib will want help to fill in the earth over the boards; there is much to do, and his servant begs that he may share the danger with the Sahib."

"You know the risk."

"Yes, Sahib," said the man calmly.

"Then stay."

"Hah!" ejaculated the old hunter, in a sigh of satisfaction, and he smiled as Mr. Kenyon held out his hand and took his follower's in a strong grip.

Then turning to the men who had helped with the digging:

"Follow my son and the Prince inside.—Now, Hal, you know your task."

"Yes, father," said Harry, with his brow all in wrinkles and his teeth set; and, leading the way, his first act was to order every one back from the ends of the wires, which he made the men protect by building a ring of big stones around them—stones which had been used to form the breastwork from behind which the defenders had fired.

As he looked up from this he saw that his father was waiting and watching; and now seeing that all was ready, he waved his hand to the boys and went down on one knee, Sree standing close by with one foot resting upon his spade.

"Why is he left alone, Phra?" asked a familiar voice, for the King had come up to the breastwork to see how matters were progressing.

Phra explained, but in the midst Harry interrupted:

"It is horribly dangerous, sir, and my father told us to keep every one back in case the powder exploded."

"Then why do you stand there with my son in such peril, boy?"

"Because I can't leave my father," said Harry, in a choking voice.

"Then you, Phra?" said the King.

"I cannot leave my friend," said Phra hoarsely.

"I forgot," said the King quietly; "and you both have your duty to do in guarding the ends of those wires. Hal, boy, your father is a brave man, and he is doing this to save my kingdom to me and our lives for us all. I too, Phra, my son, feel that I cannot leave my friend."

As he finished speaking he turned and walked slowly towards where Mr. Kenyon was still kneeling over his dangerous task; and as the King reached the place it was just as the wire had been successfully looped over the trigger and tied so that it could not slip, when Mr. Kenyon covered his work with a board whose sides rested on two ledges left for the purpose high above the gun.

"Fill in, Sree," he said quietly.—"You here, sir? Go back! Go back! I cannot answer for this. The slightest touch, and the powder will explode."

"You order me, Kenyon, your friend. I, the King, command you. Go on; finish the other now."

"But the danger, sir," said Mr. Kenyon, upon whose brow the moisture stood in great drops.

"I will share it with you," said the King calmly. "Go on."

Mr. Kenyon seized another spade, and helped in the covering in and levelling of the short piece of trench, while those who watched from the gate were in expectation moment by moment of seeing the earth rent asunder and the three standing before them torn to fragments by the explosion.

They were horrible moments, and the two boys could hardly breathe, while their hearts kept up a painful throb, as if unable to fight against the heavy pressure which kept them down.

The time seemed, too, so very long, as Mr. Kenyon once more went down upon his left knee and carefully passed the second wire loop over the trigger of the other gun, tied it there with fingers that did not tremble in the least, and then took the board, laid it carefully upon the ledges, and rose to help Sree to throw in the earth and stones.

The King had followed them there as well, and stood with his arms folded across his chest, looking proud and defiant—more like a king, Harry thought, than he had ever appeared when upon state

occasions he had mounted one of his elephants, a blaze of cloth of gold and jewels, to take his seat in a howdah which was a resplendent throne.

"At last!" said Harry, speaking unconsciously, for the heroic deed was done; but there was no triumph in the boy's tones, his voice sounded like a groan; and upon turning to glance at Phra he was startled for the moment, his comrade's face and lips were so clayey looking and strange.

Sree had shouldered the tools, and at an order walked slowly back, the King and Mr. Kenyon coming next, the former with his hand resting upon his English friend's shoulder; and as they reached the gateway the boys were startled by the rush of feet behind them.

The sounds brought them back to the duty they were set, and darting before the wires, they raised their guns to the "ready," and shouted, "Back!"

The sudden movement of the two lads had an instant effect upon the body of armed men, who for days past had been as it were under military rule. They stopped short, but only to raise gun, spear, or cap high above their heads and burst forth into a stentorian cheer, which was echoed by the little body of men fifty yards on the other side of the deadly mines.

As his brave defenders cheered again the King bowed, and with a quick movement fell back behind Mr. Kenyon, seeming to thrust him forward to receive the acclamations which rent the air again and again.

Then as they passed in amongst the defenders, with Mr. Kenyon's face showing in its marble sternness the tremendous emotion through which he had passed, Harry reached out one hand and touched his arm, to have it grasped and wrung before he went on with the King towards the terrace entrance.

"Oh, Hal," panted Phra half hysterically, "don't you feel proud?"

"Proud?" cried Harry wildly. "Oh, I wish we were not obliged to stay here. Ah!" he half yelled; "there he is! I must do something. Hi! everybody," he yelped, "three cheers for old Sree."

The cheers were given again and again, and when at a sign the guards outside marched back in two parties, single file, one on each side of the mines, the cheering burst forth again, and was kept up till the last man was within, a final roar being given when the gates were shut to and firmly secured.

"Beaten, Phra?" cried Harry excitedly, but with something in his throat; "who's going to be beaten? Here, I say, if we were free, do you know what we'd do?"

"I should like to go and shut myself in my room and cry," said Phra simply.

"Cry?" said Harry, turning angrily upon his comrade; "cry? What, like a great, silly goose of a girl?"

"Yes," said Phra gravely ; "that's how I feel."

"Cry ?" said Harry again. "Bah ! I feel as if I want to shout."

"But your eyes look quite wet, and there's a cracked sound in your voice."

"It's with shouting so, and the sun being in one's face."

"Yes," said Phra, with a wistful look and a smile. "I know, Hal. But what should we do if we were free ?"

"Go and hoist the flags on the top of the palace."

"Yes," cried Phra eagerly, "we will, and the British colours too."

The boys were relieved in an hour's time, when Mr. Kenyon came out with the King to superintend a piece of strong breast-work being built up round the spot where the two wires lay ; and when this was done, fresh guards were set. Soon after, another cheer arose from the top of the palace, to be taken up by those in the court below and wherever the defenders were distributed, for the boys had kept their word and hoisted the King's gay, silken standard and the Union Jack side by side.

"It seems as if we've frightened the enemy all away, Phra," said Harry, as he shaded his eyes and gazed from his point of vantage in every direction.

"Yes," said Phra, who was following his example ; "there isn't one to be seen."

"Hurrah !" shouted Harry.

"But it's a bad sign," said Phra ; "they mean to come on again quietly to-night."

"Then they'll never see where the ground has been dug," said Harry, "and—oh, I say, Phra, I hope they will not come ; it seems so horrid, after all."

"But if it's to save our fathers and our friends from a horrible death, I'll pull one of the wires."

"Yes," cried Harry, flushing, and with sparkling eyes, "and so will I. But I hope they'll stay away."

"Amen," said a voice behind them.

Mr. Kenyon had come up with the King, each telescope in hand, and unobserved.

CHAPTER XXVIII SAVING THE STORES

THERE was no sign to be made out of anything in the shape of immediate danger from the top of the palace, and the party soon descended to some of the more immediate trouble.

For there were the wounded to visit and to try to cheer, encouraging them with hopeful words about the future, Mr. Kenyon laying a good deal of stress upon the possibilities of help coming ere long from outside as the result of his message sent by Adong ; and as Harry went through the room turned into a hospital, he could not

help noticing the effect of his father's words, and the way in which the sufferers' eyes brightened at the very mention of a British man-o'-war.

Then there was another matter to set right. There was an ample supply of provisions in the palace stores, so long as they were not forced by the enemy to keep merely to the one wing ; and even if they were, the King had seen that there was a fortnight's provender for all ; but there was another little party shut up with them for whom provision had been made, but whose proceedings were so wholesale that it was evident something must be done.

A little council of war was held, the King being careful not to wound the susceptibilities of his English friends by taking any steps without consulting them.

And as the matter in question was discussed he said,—

"I took care to keep the elephants, thinking that possibly we might have to escape to the jungle, when they would be invaluable for the ladies ; but on further consideration it seems that they are only a useless encumbrance to us. They eat enormously, and to-morrow we should have to let them commence upon the stores of grain which we may require for ourselves."

"And you propose now, sir, to set them at liberty to shift for themselves ?" said one of the gentlemen present.

"Yes, they would get their own living in the jungle, and in happier days to come, perhaps, they might be caught again."

"It is a pity," said Mr. Kenyon. "Let me see ; there are ten, and all magnificent beasts."

"Eleven," said Harry promptly.

"Yes—eleven," said the King ; "and they are the finest that the wild droves supplied. I think we must let them go at once."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon, "and perhaps it is only hastening the loss, for if the enemy gain possession of the grounds and outer court, of course we lose them then."

"Yes, they had better go at once," said the King with a sigh, which was echoed by his son, while Harry directed an angry look at his father.

"What does that mean, Hal ?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"I'd sooner go without half my food every day than the elephants should be given up," cried the boy impetuously, "and so would Phra."

"I believe you," said the King, smiling ; "but even the whole of your daily food would not go far with one of the beasts. They might be turned into the grounds between the river and the outer wall, but it would only be for them to destroy and starve. They must be set at liberty at once while there is an opportunity. The great gate in the outer wall near the river must be opened. Mr. Kenyon, send men in advance to see if the enemy are away from that part too, and then, with a strong party to guard against surprise, we can have them led out, and the gates re-closed."

Scouts were sent at once, and a strong guard numbered off, while, as the mahouts had fled with the rest, the task of leading the elephants from their great stables was deputed to Sree and his man, Lahn, and in spite of their sorrow at the magnificent troop being sent off to resume their wild state, the two boys eagerly seized upon the event as a fresh diversion from the troubles by which they were surrounded.

Harry was all excitement directly.

"Never mind, old chap," he cried ; "let the poor beggars go. It's bad enough to feel hungry for any one my size. As for an elephant who eats so much, it must be quite awful."

"I don't like Sul to go," said Phra.

"I don't either, but cheer up ; we shall soon whop the enemy, and make prisoners of Mr. Number Two and the leaders of the riot, and have a good day settling up this little trouble ; and then we'll get old Sree and his two boys, and have days and days of elephant catching. Oh, the row will soon be over now."

Phra sighed, but he knew the necessities of the case, and joined in the business heart and soul.

Sree was as ready to perform this duty as to dig and charge mines, and as soon as the guard was ready, and the scouts had returned to announce that the coast was quite clear, a party went to the elephant stables, where Sree and Lahn went busily to work cutting off the shackles from the great beasts' hind legs, where they stood shaking their heads, waving their trunks, and trumpeting in an uneasy way which announced their desire for more food ; while as soon as they were all free, Sree and the boys went to Sul's head, the great beast was ordered to kneel, a ladder brought, and the hunter climbed into the mahout's place. Then at a word the great animal rose and started off, with the others following in a docile fashion, which seemed to suggest that they comprehended what was going on.

Harry had provided himself for the occasion, and when the little procession started, he and Phra placed themselves on either side of the great leader's head feeding him with biscuits, his trunk being turned alternately from one lad to the other in search of their offerings as he shuffled away, blinking his eyes and uttering a low "chuntering" sound, as if talking all the time.

"He's asking if we're going out after tigers," said Harry, laughing.

"Not he," said Phra ; "he knows he's going off for a run in the forest, and the others know it too."

"Nonsense ! "

"I don't care : they do," said Phra. "If they didn't they'd be rushing about here and there to begin breaking off and eating the green boughs."

The first gate was passed, leading from the court into the outer grounds, and almost in silence the great beasts shuffled along in single file, treading with absurd exactness in each other's steps, while the guard on being overtaken, trotted on in advance till the

outer wall was reached, with a couple of men perched on the top of the ponderous gates keeping a look-out.

At a word from Sree the great elephant he rode stopped and knelt, extending his trunk for a foothold, so that his temporary mahout could climb down.

Meanwhile four men of the guard had leaned their spears against the wall, raised and swung round the massive bars, and then after a great deal of tugging managed to drag open one of the double gates, beyond which lay open paddy fields, and on the other side the wild jungle, the river being away to their right.

"Good-bye, Sul," cried Harry, and the elephant turned his trunk for another biscuit. "There you are—the last, perhaps, that I shall ever give you."

The elephant turned his trunk under and tucked the biscuit into his huge, wet mouth, then extended his flexible proboscis for more.

But there were no more, and the silent, visible request to Phra made in turn was just as unsuccessful.

"There, Sree," cried Phra huskily, "tell them to go."

Sree took a step forward and repeated a few words in his native tongue, with the result that Sul threw up his trunk and made a peculiar noise, which was responded to by one of the elephants behind, and then he went off with a rush, squealing, trumpeting, and setting up his comical little tail; and the troop followed suit, getting over the ground at a tremendous pace and making straight for the jungle.

"Well, it has made them happy," said Harry, looking after the troop wistfully.

"Yes, they're glad enough to get away from the poor wretches doomed to be killed," said Phra bitterly.

"Doomed to be smothered!" cried Harry sharply. "What nonsense! Look at them. Just like a lot of children let out for a run."

"We shall never see old Sul again," sighed Phra.

"Not if we stand here like this," replied Harry. "Do you see why the elephants rushed off so quickly just now?"

"No. They are glad of their liberty, perhaps, and the chance of getting plenty to eat."

"No; they smelt danger."

"Danger? Where?"

Out yonder to the left. I caught a glimpse of the tops of spears twinkling in the sun."

"Where? I can see nothing."

"Because you are not looking the right way. Over there, where there must be a deep ditch between two of the rice fields. Yes, there's a long line of twinkling spear tops. They've seen the place opened and the elephants let out, and they're trying to sneak up along that dyke and rush in before we can shut the gate."

"Yes, quick, quick!" cried Sree; and setting the example, which half a dozen followed, amongst them the gate was being

pushed to, Harry getting a farewell glance at the troop of elephants as they disappeared through the edge of the jungle.

Those who closed the gate were none too soon, for, unseen, another party had crept up close to the now unwatched wall, the scouts having descended as soon as the guard arrived ; and just as the distance between the two great leaves of the gates was being reduced to a mere slit, a spear was thrust through.

Then *crack, crack*, the edge of the gate caught it and snapped the bamboo shaft in two, the bright, sharp head falling inside.

"More help !" shouted Sree, for there was a rush of men to force the gate open again ; but the defenders being reinforced, the leaves were held together till one of the huge bars was thrust into its place, and a savage yelling ensued, followed by a little shower of spears which had been darted nearly straight upward and fell amongst the defenders.

The weapons of these latter were too valuable to be used in this manner ; but while the final efforts were being made to secure the ponderous means of exit, two of the men pulled the quivering shafts out of the ground, and sent them flying back in the same way, repeating the act till a sharp cry from outside told that one of the attacking party had been hurt.

"Better run back, sahibs," said Sree now, as the babble of voices outside increased suddenly, telling that the party which had been detected creeping along the dyke had now joined those who came by the wall.

"Yes, there's nothing to be gained by staying here," said Phra. "We couldn't keep them back if they had ladders to climb over."

Just then there was a shot from the direction of the palace, and the puff of smoke showed where it had been fired.

"Fighting begun ?" cried Harry.

"No," said Phra ; "a signal for us to run back. Come on."

Phra was right, for their proceedings had been watched from the top of the palace by means of a glass, and hence as soon as the gate had been seen to be secure the signal was fired to call them back.

They were met by Mr. Kenyon, glass in hand, as they ran up.

"I was watching you from the top there," he said.

"Didn't you see the spears as the men came along the ditch ?" asked Phra.

"No, or I should have sent help at once. Of course I could not detect the men coming up under shelter of the wall. Well, we have done two good things to-day : got rid of those devourers of our stores, and found out that the enemy are hiding about the country beyond the walls."

"Think they are on this side too, father ?" asked Harry.

"I feel sure they are, my boy. They lie all along a loop whose two ends rest on the river's bank, while their boats guard the terrace

and landing-place as well. This means fresh attacks as soon as they have recovered from the check they have just received."

"But why don't they attack us from some other side—come over the walls?" said Harry.

"It does not seem to be their way. Yonder is the main way into the palace, and they commenced by attacking there; but perhaps they will try fresh plans now. I am, with the King's permission, going to strengthen one weak part, though, before night comes."

"Which is that?" asked Phra.

"The one where we managed to get in," replied Mr. Kenyon. "Here, Sree, are you willing, if I have you well supported, to get up into that tree and cut off all the boughs which project over the wall?"

"Yes, Sahib," said the old hunter quietly. "I have thought that it ought to be done."

"Yes, and the sooner the better; it will set two men free from keeping watch at the windows overlooking that part of the wall."

"Shall I begin now, Sahib?" said Sree.

"No; not till dark, and I have not yet made my plans."

"Whenever the Sahib pleases," said Sree quietly, "his servant is ready. But why not burn the big tree down?"

CHAPTER XXIX THE DOCTOR KEPT BUSY

STRICT watch was kept on all sides, but no farther sign of the enemy was seen, and towards evening, permission being given, preparations were made for the destruction of the tree.

Sree's idea had found favour, but the question was how the task was to be done. Once the fire was started it was felt that there could be no doubt about the tree's fate, it being of a resinous kind; but the task was to get it well alight, for a furnace built against the trunk would have had but little effect, and it was nearly decided that the best way would, after all, be to cut off some of the nearest limbs.

An idea, however, struck Harry, as he and Phra came upon a stack of bamboo poles collected there to dry until required for various uses.

Harry's idea was that if the poles were passed over the wall and piled round the great trunk as close as possible, and with their thinner portions running up into the tree among the branches, the shape of the stack with the air passages between the tall poles would ensure a sharp draught of air, and a fire if lit would soon become fierce.

Mr. Kenyon snatched at the plan, and men were set to work carrying the poles to the wall beneath the tree; then after a careful look round, it was deemed safe for Sree to climb over in

company with Lahn, after which men were ready to hand over the poles so as to keep Sree and his boy well employed, the one in the tree, the other at the foot, arranging the poles.

Just before sundown this was commenced, half a dozen well-armed men being ready at the window to cover the workers, and bamboo ladders having been placed for their convenience, while torches of resinous wood were lit, waiting to be used.

Then, for about an hour, the work went on till darkness set in, and the tree had grown into a strange, unsightly object, while the torches in the yard grew brighter and brighter, till they cast strange shadows of the workers in all directions.

Suddenly there was an alarm of the enemy's approach, and no more time was bestowed upon the task. The word was given, and the torches passed over the wall to Sree, who had descended from the tree, and now thrust them in between the bamboos into a kind of chimney which the pile had formed.

"Make haste, Sree," cried Harry, who was seated beside Phra on the top of the wall.

"Yes, Sahib," said the man quietly.

"But the wood does not burn."

"No, Sahib; the big bamboos are slow to catch fire, but when they do they will burn fast."

"Here, Phra, I'm getting fidgety," whispered Harry. "The rebels must have seen those torches flashing about, and perhaps they're crawling up in the darkness."

"Yes, I'm afraid they will be," replied Phra. "How long he is!"

"Yes, and it makes my wound throb."

"Your wound?"

"Yes, I don't know why, but it does. I say, you up at the windows, be on the look out, please, and ready to fire."

"All ready," said a voice; "but you'd better make haste with the work, in case the enemy should be coming up."

"Yes, yes. Hi! Sree, can't you get that wood to burn?"

"Not yet, Sahib; but it soon will."

"Where's Lahn?" cried Harry.

"I'm here, Sahib."

"Sree does not want you now; come up the ladder, and get inside."

The man obeyed, scrambling quickly up the rough bamboo steps and passing over the wall, when Phra stopped him.

"Wo!" he said. "Stop there, and hold the top of the ladder fast."

"Pass up two loaded guns," said Harry, looking down inside.

This was done, and Phra and Harry each took and cocked his piece as they sat astride of the wall, facing each other, but with Lahn between them holding the top of the ladder, his keen eyes peering first in one direction, then in the other, where the view was not obstructed by the tree.

"Oh, I say, I say!" cried Harry, as the darkness increased, and nothing but a feeble glow appeared through the pile of great grasses. "You have not gone to sleep, have you, Sree?"

"No, Sahib," came from below, with a soft chuckle. "I ought to have had some small, dry wood to burn first. It is very slow."

"Slow? Oh, it's horrible!"

"The Sahib hurries."

"Hurries? Yes. Do you suppose I want to sit here till the enemy comes, so as to see you speared?"

"It is too dark, Sahib," said the man softly; "they could not see me."

"Nonsense! I can see you from up here—your hands and face: the fire shines upon them."

"Yes, Sahib; it is beginning now."

At that moment Lahn laid his hand upon Harry's breast, while he pointed away to the left with the other, and uttered a low, snake-like hiss.

"Men coming?" asked Sree. "Well, I must get the fire to burn now."

"Can you see them?" whispered Harry, as he strained his eyesight in the pointed-out direction without result, and then looked down at a little writhing tongue of flame beginning to run up inside the sloping pile of bamboo.

"Yes, many men," whispered Lahn, and he hissed sharply twice.

"Look out up there," said Harry loudly. "The enemy. Now, Sree, up at once."

But at that moment the rough ladder held by Lahn was snatched away, and seemed to fall over against the bamboo pile from the noise that was made, while at the same moment there was a faint, rustling sound, sharp clicks against the side of the palace, and the rattling down of at least a dozen spears, which had been hurled up at the speaker, and passed over the wall.

"Down with you from off there," shouted Mr. Kenyon at the window. "We can't fire with you there."

Accustomed to obey, the boys threw their legs over the inner side, felt for the ladders, and then crouched down, Lahn following their example.

"No, no," he cried, "don't fire; Sree is on the other side."

"Oh!" cried Mr. Kenyon. There was a momentary silence, and more spears flew over, evidently directed at the window, a sharp exclamation telling that one had taken effect, the others clattering down again into the narrow court between the walls.

"Can't he reach the ladder?" cried Mr. Kenyon.

"It is gone," replied Harry; but before he spoke he had laid his gun on the top of the wall, set free the ladder upon which he stood, and was helping Lahn to raise it up so as to pass it over and lower it on the other side, meaning to call to Sree to take advantage of this to escape.

But before it was half up they paused, and lowered it quickly down again, for suddenly the result of Sree's long and careful preparation manifested itself. There was a bright flash of flame seen running up the bamboo pile, and by the light it shed the space beyond the wall displayed scores of bright spear points, and double that number of flashing eyes.

It was almost instantaneous, for the light died out again, hidden by a dense cloud of smoke ; but it had been long enough to show no sign of Sree, and that to lower a ladder down meant to make a way for scores of the enemy to come running up and over the wall.

"The other ladder—where is it ?" whispered Harry wildly to Lahn.

"On the fire," said the man.

"But Sree—did you see poor Sree ?"

"No," said the man, with all the stolid manner of an Eastern. "Said ciss, but he did not come."

There was another flash, and a fresh shower of spears, followed by a dull red glow through the smoke. Then flash after flash in quick succession, accompanied by what might have been taken at a distance for a confused volley of pistol shots ; for now, with a roar, the fire blazed up, rushing rapidly through the bamboos and into the body of the tree, whose green leaves hissed and crackled, and began to blaze brightly, lighting up the gardens beyond the wall, and compelling the defenders at the window to crouch behind their breastwork, beginning to fire sharply now, and driving back the crowding enemy, some of the boldest of whom had run forward to begin pulling down the bamboos where they had not yet caught.

In another minute all such attempts would have been in vain, for the fire rapidly swept round in a spiral, the poles cracking with loud reports. Showers of sparks flew up on what appeared to be a whirl of ruddy smoke, while, as the flames roared up as from a furnace, the boughs began to yield to its fiery tongues, which licked up all the moisture, and in an incredibly short space of time the whole tree was one hissing, seething pile of fiercely writhing flames. The heat soon forced the boys to slide down the ladders, and the defenders to shrink from the window, whose breastwork and outer shutters began to blister and crack in so alarming a way that the occupants of the room fetched water to be ready to extinguish the first part that caught.

The light was reflected down upon the boys as they laid the ladders close up against the wall, and then turned to look anxiously at the pyramid of flame in such close proximity to the palace, wondering whether Sree's work had not been too well done.

But far away and above all other thoughts, was that which struck home in their breasts—had poor Sree fallen a victim to his fidelity and his determination to get the fire well alight before he sought his own safety ?

The boys hurriedly discussed this in whispers, and then they turned to question Lahn as to the plucking away of the ladder.

"Could you see anything?" Harry asked.

"Yes, two enemies got to the ladder," said the man in Siamese. "Sree pulled it over into the fire."

"And what then?—where was Sree?"

The man shook his head.

"Don't know," he said. "A big smoke came, and all turned dark."

"Do you think Sree was killed?"

"No. Sree too clever. Kill the men."

They asked no more, for, surrounded as he would be by foes, they could see no chance of the poor fellow escaping; so with their hearts sinking in despair, they remained gazing up at the floating flakes of fire and the spangled wreaths of smoke which whirled up over the palace, while the heat was reflected back upon them with such power that in spite of the rush of comparatively cool air caused by the rising fire and steam, they had to retreat and pass along to the corner where, some twenty yards away, they could stand and watch the burning tree.

They could hear nothing of the enemy, and were ready to go round to the terrace entrance; but something seemed to hold them there—a strange, undefined something in the form of hope that Sree might somehow have escaped, and that they might at any moment see his head rise up in the light where the dark top of the wall ran in a hard line.

Then, too, there was the excitement about the palace, as the fire waved to and fro and roared louder than ever, while the bigger boughs, as they grew super-heated, burst with loud reports to let out the compressed steam.

A dozen times over it seemed certain that the palace must go, for the wooden jalousies and exposed elaborate carvings, kept catching; but a few buckets of water, carefully distributed, extinguished the flames, and it became plain that the enemy had retired to a safe distance, hiding among the trees, for no more spears were thrown and no shots were fired.

At last it was evident that the fire had passed its culminating point, and the spectators gazed at a glowing skeleton whose framework kept on falling into the main body of the fire below. At first they were small branches which hardly reached the bottom, but were borne up again to pass away in fresh clouds of what looked like golden snow. Then heavier boughs were burned through and dropped, carrying down with them those below, and so on and on till the trunk alone stood, with the stumps of branches rising high above the wall, one glowing tower of dazzling light doomed to burn on and on probably for hours, and then, fanned by the wind, slowly smoulder away into so much golden ash.

But before this could be achieved, and when it was certain that no danger could accrue to that part of the palace, Phra laid his hand upon his companion's shoulder.

"Come," he said abruptly, and he made a sign to Lahn for him to follow.

Five minutes later they were at the back of the line of defence, in front of the great, open-work bronze gates ; but all was quiet there ; no sign of the enemy had been seen, and with the palace between them and the burning tree the boys looked up at it as it stood out against the glow shed by the fire, which lit up the two flags floating side by side, blown out by the soft breeze caused by the rush of hot air rising from the fire.

"Let's go in and tell them, Hal," said Phra. "They will be waiting to know."

Harry nodded shortly, but said no word, walking slowly into the great hall, where two of the first persons they encountered were Mr. Kenyon and the King.

Under the pressure of questions the boys related in simple words all that had occurred, the King listening till they had done, and then standing with wrinkled brow and compressed lip.

Mr. Kenyon was the first to utter what sounded like a confirmation of his thoughts in Harry's ear.

"Poor Sree!" he said sadly ; "as brave a man as ever stepped. I looked upon him as a friend."

"Everything a man should be," said the King, endorsing this utterance of the poor fellow's fate : "simple, modest, devoted and true. Kenyon, my friend, we have lost one of our best supporters. He died trying to shield us from the perils which hem us in."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon, sharply now, as if making an effort to thrust the inevitable behind him. "You are neither of you hurt, boys?"

"My arm aches a great deal," said Harry, speaking in a dull, apathetic way.

"Ah! Your wound. Let Dr. Cameron see it at once."

"Oh, not to-night, father."

"To-night, Hal—directly. You have been using it a great deal, and the bandages need loosening because the cut is swollen and inflamed."

"And you, Phra?" said the King quietly.

"A mere nothing, father."

"What, wounded?" cried the King, with a quick change from his calm, grave manner to eager excitement, as he caught his son's arm.

"Not a wound, father. A spear whistled by my ear when we were on the top of the wall. I had forgotten it. My ear is a little cut, but it soon stopped bleeding."

The King uttered a sigh of relief as he thought of what a few inches' difference in the direction would have meant.

"Go in with Hal, and ask Doctor Cameron to look to it."

"Oh, but father, it is——"

"My wish, sir," said the King firmly. "You had both better rest then, for you have done your share of the work."

Phra looked a protest, and the King went on:

"Unless the enemy attack us in force to-night; then of course you will both come and help. Now, Kenyon, let us go our rounds. This quietness is more startling than an attack. I fear they are planning something fresh."

"Very likely, sir," said Mr. Kenyon cheerfully; "but we must scheme in return."

They went on down to the barricade by the gate, and the boys sighed wearily as they walked towards Doctor Cameron's hospital room; for the spirit seemed to have sunk down in them just as the fire had fallen after it had reached its height.

"What a capital English gentleman your father would make if he dressed like us," said Harry, for the sake of saying something.

"Yes, and what a good Siamese noble your father would make if he dressed like some of ours," said Phra, with a faint smile.

"All right," said Harry; "that's one each. But I say, it seems very stupid to go to the doctor for such hurts as these."

"Yes, we must say the King sent us, or he will laugh."

But Doctor Cameron did not laugh: he frowned as he examined Phra's left ear.

"A narrow escape, my dear boy; but as we people say, a miss is as good as a mile. Only this is not a miss: the spear blade has cut the lobe of your ear in two. I must put in a stitch or two and draw it together before strapping it up. I'll bathe it directly. Ah, here's my wife. Bathe this injury, my dear."

Phra shrank, but resigned himself directly to Mrs. Cameron's hands, while her husband turned to Harry.

"Oh, it's nothing," said the boy. "We shouldn't have come, only father and the King ordered us to show you our awful injuries."

"This is worse than you think, my dear Hal," said the doctor sternly. "Your arm is much swollen and inflamed. It would have been seriously bad if you had waited till to-morrow."

"Oh," cried Harry passionately; "what do I care? It's horrible; it's too hard to bear!"

"What, this?" said the doctor sharply.

"This?" cried Harry. "Pish! No!—NO! But you don't know. Poor old Sree—poor old Sree, Mrs. Cameron: he's dead—he's dead!"

CHAPTER XXX
LIKE A BAD SHILLING

WHEN they quitted the hospital room, Harry and Phra threw themselves down on one of the long bamboo seats in the hall where they had left their guns, and sat talking dejectedly in a low tone, leaving off from time to time for a walk out into the still night air to listen whether there were any tokens of an approaching attack ; but the place was perfectly still ; the glow from the burning tree had nearly died out, and everything was calm and peaceful.

After a time the King and Mr. Kenyon returned from their rounds and stopped to speak to the boys for a few minutes, telling them that they had better get a good sleep while they could, and that they had been examining the windows at the other side of the palace, where they had been a good deal burned.

"I'm afraid, sir, that was a mistake," said Mr. Kenyon. "It may have suggested to the enemy a means of attacking and destroying us without risk to themselves."

"By firing the palace," said the King gravely. "Yes. I thought of that. It is possible, and we must be prepared. Fire is easily mastered when it is small—a jar of water is sufficient ; when it grows large, it takes a river."

They passed on, talking together, and the boys began and continued recalling the many expeditions they had made with Sree. What a brave man he was ! how full of knowledge of animal life in the jungle, and how devoted to them in his simple, unostentatious manner !

"Yes, poor old Sree !" sighed Harry ; "and now he's gone, and Adong too."

"Think so ?" said Phra, looking up sharply.

"Oh, yes, or he would have been back with help," replied Harry. "Phra, old chap, I never felt so unhappy before in my life. It seems as if it was all over now."

"But it isn't," said Phra. "There is so much for us to do."

"To help our fathers ?"

"Yes."

Harry sat back in his seat and began to think seriously, for his comrade's words had impressed him deeply, and as he sat there in the darkness of the night it dawned upon him more and more that in life one has to give up self for the sake of others, and that even at the very worst, when there is a disposition to think that one's own sorrows are everything, others have troubles and sorrows too that it is our duty to help and combat.

They were vague, disconnected thoughts, which he could not quite put together, but they served to make him feel less miserable, even contented ; and then he began to think of the King's words

in connection with his father's, and the possibility of the palace being fired by the enemy.

What had the King said?—that at the beginning a fire could be extinguished with a jar of water?

Consequently Harry sat back making up his mind that as soon as it was light he and Phra would get the boatmen together and plant big jars and bamboo buckets of water in the parts of the palace nearest to the wall—in fact, wherever it seemed possible that firebrands would be thrown in.

The natural consequence was that, being fagged out and sitting in an uncomfortable position upon a hard-backed seat, he dropped off to sleep and began dreaming of fire and putting it out with wooden buckets of water which always seemed to be empty when he was about to pour them on the flames.

And so the night wore on, without any alarm of attack, and Harry dreaming wearily, starting into wakefulness, and dropping off again to dream of those bottomless buckets which were always empty when they ought to have been full.

That constantly repeated dream irritated him, for even while he dreamed he was conscious that it was all imaginative, and that before long he would wake up and find he was dreaming, as he did over and over again, stiff, weary, and ready to make up his mind that he would sleep no more. But the next minute he was off again fast, and the last time in so deep a slumber that the sun was shining brightly when at last he opened his eyes upon Phra seated fast asleep at the other corner of the settee; and then turning his eyes a little to the right as he prepared his lower jaw for a good long yawn, he sat as if turned to stone, his mouth partly open, his eyes staring, and a horrible feeling as of cold water running down his back.

For there, so near that he had only to sit up and stretch out his hand to touch him, Sree was squatted upon his heels in the middle of a mat, calmly chewing his roll of betel-nut, lime and pepper leaf, his homely, dark face expanding into a broad smile as he saw that he was noticed.

"Sree! Alive!" cried Harry, springing from his seat, his cry rousing Phra, to sit up staring.

"Yes, Sahib Harry," said the old hunter quietly. "I ran round to the back of the fire when I had pulled the ladder over and laid it with the bamboos, and then crept in among the bushes, to lie there, for I was nearly dead with the smoke. Then I crawled right away."

"But weren't you hurt?"

"My face scorched, and my hair burned a little, Sahib; that is all."

"Oh, I am so glad, Sree," cried Harry. "You don't—don't know what we felt last night."

There was a slight impediment in Harry's speech as he caught the old hunter's right hand in both his own, an act imitated by

Phra on the instant with the left, while the old man stood now looking proud and happy as he glanced from one to the other.

"Yes, we thought you were dead," said Phra.

"Here, let me go and tell father and the doctor," said Harry.

"No, no, Sahib," said Sree. "I saw Sahib Kenyon an hour ago, and he sent me to you. I have been sitting here till you woke up. He said you would be pleased."

"Pleased!" cried Harry. "There's a stupid word! That doesn't half mean what I feel. But I say, Sree, have you had any breakfast?"

"Oh, yes, Sahib; the master gave me plenty."

"Tell us more, then. How did you manage to get here?"

"Oh, I crawled along like a snake, Sahib," said Sree, smiling. "There are many of the enemy about, but I managed to get by without being seen while it was dark; and when the sun rose, I got up and walked along boldly with a spear over my shoulder, just as if I was one of the enemy, till I was opposite to the great gates where the powder is buried. Then I came straight up to the gate, and the sahibs were going to shoot me, for my face was so blackened by the fire and smoke that they did not know me till I spoke. Then I gave them my spear, and climbed over. What does Sahib Harry want me to do next?"

"Fill water pots and bamboo buckets with water, to put in the rooms at the other side."

"Ah, yes; that is wise," said Sree. "I thought of that last night, when I saw the windows begin to burn. A little fire can be mastered with a jar of water."

"Hullo!" cried Harry. "Did you hear the King say that?"

"Oh, no, Sahib; we all say so, because we know how easily our boats catch alight; and if the fire is not put out, it may mean hundreds all along the river."

"Then we'll do that at once," said Phra; "only you must get Lahn and the boatmen to help."

"But that's my idea, Phra," cried Harry; "I say, Sree, have you seen Lahn?"

"Oh, yes, Sahib; he came running up, and then threw himself down to kiss and cry over my feet."

"What did he do that for?" said Harry.

"Because he was so glad, for he thinks of me as his father."

"Now, Hal!" cried Phra; "come on; let's get the water pots put all about at once."

"Shan't," said Hal, laughing. "I'm not going to begin till I've had my breakfast. I'm so hungry I could eat old Sree."

CHAPTER XXXI
COMING HOME TO ROOST

THAT day passed away quietly enough, the enemy making no sign; but scouts reported that they were in hiding in all directions.

"They mean to starve us out, boys," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Oh," said Harry, "then they'll have to take care that they don't get starved first, for now the elephants are gone I suppose we could live for a month on the grain."

It was as if the very mention of the word elephants had been the introduction to what was to come, for just then the peculiar noise known as trumpeting—which is really an agreeable blend in the way of noises, of pig in a gate, the final *haw*, prolonged and intense, of a donkey's bray, and the hoarse crow of a Cochin China cock—came faintly in through the open windows of the hall.

Harry ran and looked out to where Sree and Lahn sat waiting and listening.

"What was that, Sree?" he cried, as Phra followed him and looked out too.

"It was an elephant, Sahib," said the hunter.

"Yes, it was old Sul," cried Phra excitedly.

"I know," cried Harry, laughing. "They've been and had a tremendous good feed out in the jungle, and now they've all come back."

Harry was quite right, as examination proved, for the elephants had been thoroughly well trained, and treated in a way which made them prefer their civilized home to the jungle. So after a few words with Mr. Kenyon the King gave orders that a strong party should go across to the gate and guard it while the animals were admitted.

The two boys hastened to join the party, taking Sree with them, when, having learned wisdom from the last time the gates were opened, ladders were placed against the wall, and a good look-out kept, so that no advance could be made along the side ditch or by the wall unnoticed.

All being declared clear, and the guard stationed ready on either side, the gate was unfastened, the elephants standing patiently waiting, the trumpeting having ceased as soon as the first man's head appeared above the wall, while directly the gate was being dragged open, Sul thrust his head against it and pushed, making the task particularly easy. But as soon as there was ample room he uttered a peculiar squeak, and shuffled off across the park-like grounds, followed by the troop of ten, all evidently eager to get back to their old quarters, to which they made their way.

"They'll want to go off again," said Harry, laughing. "Aren't you glad to see them back, Phra?"

"Glad? Of course; it seemed horrible to lose them all. I never expected to see either of them again."

"What are you shaking your head at, Sree?" cried Harry, as they waited till the gates were once more secure.

"I was listening to what the Sahib said," replied the old hunter. "I am not surprised to see the elephants come back. Once they get used to man, and find he is a friend who feeds them, and treats them well, they do not want to leave him. Some of the mahouts are cruel, and make their heads sore with the goads, but I think kindness is best. I have made friends with the great beasts, often with big ones that the mahouts said were savage-tempered and dangerous. I never found them so."

"Not when they were mad?" said Phra.

"Oh, yes, then," replied the man. "They are dangerous at times, and it does not do to trust them much. Better let them loose in the jungle."

"We might as well have made old Sul stop and carry us back," said Harry. "I say; there were no fighting men anywhere outside; do you think they will come to-night?"

"Who knows, Sahib? Perhaps not to-night, but they will come and try to take the place, or they would not be waiting as I saw them this morning. They have some plan in their minds, but we are ready, and must meet them when they come."

But there was no sign of the enemy that night, nor the next, and such a state of calm that it was hard to imagine that the palace was still beleaguered. There was no doubt of this, though, for it was only necessary to send out a scout in any direction for him to find bodies of the enemy watching the palace, and ready to check any attempt at escape, if such had been the intention of the besieged.

This state of quietude enabled Mr. Kenyon and his English friends to finish several little arrangements for the defence, and the risk of fire was reduced by the amount of water provided for checking the first attempt to destroy the place, if such should prove to be the enemy's design. The earthwork at the great gates, too, was strengthened; for though there was the possibility of the attack being made in another portion of the defences, it seemed probable that it would be made as before.

"They're like elephants, Hal," Phra said contemptuously; "they keep to the old track."

The halt on the part of the enemy gave the doctor's patients a better chance of amendment, and the spirit that was within made several ready to return to the duties of the defence, each declaring that he would get better more quickly busy with his friends than lying as an invalid in bed, in spite of the gentle ministrations of the ladies, who did everything possible to help the doctor with his charge.

Generally speaking, everything now had settled down in the palace to a complete state of routine. Watches were regularly set,

including one on the roof, by the flagstaff, whence portions of the river could be seen ; and longing looks were constantly cast, in the vain hope of seeing help in the shape of the well-manned boats of some British man-o'-war.

Plans too were made as to the provisioning of the little garrison, and arranging that the stores should last as long as possible. This duty, with the care for the health of the place, devolved upon the doctor who proved to be most stern in his insistence upon every one obeying his rules.

Harry and Phra took their turns in going on duty, and it fell to their lot to superintend the guard when the elephants were let out and returned from the jungle, the sagacious beasts marching off regularly every morning, and forming a regular path across the grounds to the distant gates, while, strange to state, a whole week elapsed without the enemy again interfering and attempting to gain an entrance at such times.

"There is a meaning in it all, father says. They have lost so many men that they have determined to starve us out," Phra said one morning to his companion.

"Yes ; so my father thinks," replied Harry ; "or else it is that they are waiting for reinforcements."

"I don't think they would have to wait," replied Phra. "No ; depend upon it, they think we shall give up soon, and lay down our arms."

"So that they may march in and jump upon us, and then cut off our heads ?"

Phra's face looked quite old with wrinkles as he gave his companion a sombre look, and then nodded.

"Perhaps they would be content, and let you English people off, if you gave up my father and his faithful friends."

"And you with them ?" said Harry gravely.

"Of course."

"Can't spare you, old chap. Bah ! What are you talking about ? If they think anything of that sort, they are more stupid than I thought for. Give up ? They don't know what English people are yet. Why, Phra, we shall go on fighting till all the provisions are done, and then we shall make a fresh start."

"How ?"

"By killing one of the elephants and eating him. Let's see ; eleven of them. How long would they last ?"

"Nonsense !"

"'Tisn't. Old Mike would cook them so as to make something good, and so that they wouldn't be tough."

"Don't make fun out of our troubles," said Phra bitterly.

"Why not ? they're bad enough, so one needn't try to make them worse."

"What I dread is——" began Phra, but Harry interrupted him.

"I know ; that the enemy won't come and be well thrashed."

"No ; that the water supply will be stopped. Father wondered that they had not dug up the bamboo pipes and cut that off."

"Pooh ! Let them. Father and Doctor Cameron talked that over the other night, and they said that near as we are to the river they would find water before we had dug down ten feet, and there would be abundance. Look here, Phra ; I've thought over it all, and now the place is so strong we can laugh at the enemy and starve them out. Give up ? Why, if it came to the worst, we should shut ourselves up in that wing, and blow away the big passage which joins it to the rest of the palace. Then we should defend it step by step till we were on the roof, and fight there till the last of us was killed. English people would rather die fighting than give up to be murdered by a set of savages like the enemy."

Phra was silent.

"Well, wouldn't you ?" said Harry.

"Yes," said Phra gravely. "I suppose I should be horribly frightened, but I should know that it was my duty to fight for my father to the last, and I should fight."

"Of course you would, and so should I," cried Harry, flushing. "As to being frightened, well, I don't think we should be a bit. We should feel that shinky-shanky sensation which makes you shiver and feel hot and cold and wish you were somewhere else, and want to run away, only you wouldn't for the world. I believe everyone feels that at such times—say if any one's drowning, and you don't want to jump in after him, or when there's a tiger or a big snake ; but I don't think that's being frightened; that's only natural, because one would jump into the water to save any fellow drowning, or go and do anything. It's only a sort of hanging back before one begins. It can't be regular fright, old chap, because, if it was, we should run, and that we couldn't do. Now, that's real fright : we should be afraid to do that."

"You're a queer fellow, Hal," said Phra, smiling.

"Am I ? Well, so are other English boys, for I suppose I'm like most of them. I don't want to fight. I hate it. It's horrible, but I think I shall not be afraid to fight ; but I'm sure I should be afraid to run away."

"I hope I should," said Phra thoughtfully, "and I don't want the fighting to begin again ; but this miserable waiting day after day for aid to come is terrible. I say, do you think Adong will bring help ?"

"Not now, I don't. I'm afraid the poor chap has been killed, or he would have come back. He'd have made his way to us, the same as Sree did. I say, I begin to feel as you do—wish it would all come to an end."

CHAPTER XXXII
IN THE NICK OF TIME

SUNSET had come. The elephants had returned to the gate, and, being admitted without the sign of an enemy, had tramped quietly to their stables after their hearty banquet upon the succulent, jungle leaves.

Then the darkness fell, the evening meal was eaten, the guard set, and after a chat with Sree, the boys went to their beds, to lie down dressed—ready for anything, and dropped off soundly to sleep.

In what seemed like ten minutes Harry was awake again, to be conscious of a busy stir in the palace and Sree leaning over him with a hand upon his shoulder.

“What’s the matter ?” cried the boy ; “are they attacking ?”

“Yes, Sahib ; there is going to be a big fight, and they are coming on with lights.”

“Ah !” cried Harry, “at last ! Here, Phra !”

“I’m ready,” was the reply, and a minute later, gun in hand, the boys were out on the terrace, learning that the enemy was coming on in two bodies, their presence having been detected by Sree and Lahn, who were on guard, and whose keen ears had caught the low, rustling sound of their approach.

There was no excitement among the defenders, for in obedience to several orders made for acting upon in case of such an emergency, every one had gone quietly to his place, the ammunition chests were thrown open, and arrangements made for keeping all well supplied, while the ladies had hurriedly dressed and gone to their post in the hospital room to wait till the doctor, who was with those who were in consultation on the terrace, should need their services.

“Where are the boys ?” said Mr. Kenyon suddenly.

The answer came from close behind him.

“Here, quick !” he said ; “take the night glass and go up on the roof. You may be able to make out something of the movements of the enemy. Be back here in ten minutes.”

Harry and Phra ran off, the glass was obtained, and they made their way to the flagstaffs.

It was wonderfully still, not a breath of air perceptible, and the darkness was intense low down, though above the sky was one glorious encrustation of stars.

For a few moments nothing could be seen, and they stood listening to a peculiar, murmurous sound from away over the great gates, evidently caused by the movement of a large body of men.

The telescope was brought to bear in that direction, but still nothing could be seen, and Harry, who held it, swept it round to the back, where all seemed black too ; but suddenly a bright

spark darted into the field of vision, then another, and another, and the boy handed the glass to his companion.

"Look right over the corner yonder," he whispered.

Phra adjusted the glass, but before he had time to make out that which had met Harry's eye the latter uttered a sharp ejaculation.

"What is it?" cried Phra.

"The river is alive with boats. They're just coming round the bend where the trees are. They all have lanthorns, and it would be a beautiful sight if they weren't coming to destroy this place."

"Yes, beautiful," said Phra. "We've seen enough. There's a party coming on with torches behind; the enemy are in the front, and they are coming up to land on the water terrace to attack us at the side."

"Come on down," said Harry, drawing a deep breath. "It's going to be a big fight to-night, and we shall have to retreat in here."

Their information was carried to Mr. Kenyon, with whom was the King, and, as Harry had said, instructions were given for the defence by the gate to be held as long as possible before a retreat was made to the palace wing; a party was sent round to strengthen the guard in the rooms, the instructions being to think of nothing but extinguishing the fire if it should catch hold, for it was not judged likely that any attempts to scale the wall would be made there. And then as strong a party as could be spared was sent in the direction of the great, stone landing-place in case of an attack being made there, with orders to quickly retire if they were much pressed, so that the strength might be concentrated at and about the palace.

The darkness did not seem to interfere with the movements in the least, for every man was familiar now with the dark paths beyond the court, and knew what he had to do, moving with the stern determination to perform that duty even at the cost of his life.

The silence now grew more and more painful, and the defenders, who knew but little of what was going on at the back of the palace, their attention being concentrated upon the front or water side, were longing for the suspense of waiting to be brought to an end, so that they might find relief in action, when suddenly there arose a burst of shouting, and a faint glow rose over the roof of the principal building.

The great danger foreseen had come, for a body of the enemy bearing burning brands had advanced boldly up to a short distance from the wall, close to the ashes of the burned tree, and begun hurling the blazing wood against the windows within reach.

It was so quickly done that it seemed as if a splash of light suddenly darted out of the darkness beneath the wall, quivered for a moment in the air, and then described a curve, passing over

the wall, striking against the barricaded window, rebounding, and falling down into the narrow court below.

This continued rapidly; and though a glimpse was now and then caught of a dark face with flashing eyes, as the burning brand was thrown, it was so momentary that it was considered waste of ammunition to fire.

Harry and Phra had hurried there directly they had given warning, and one of the first orders given was for two of the faithful Siamese to go down into the court and provide themselves with a bamboo bucket of water. Then as fast as the brands flew over the wall, struck the palace, and dropped down, they were seized, and their burning ends quenched.

They came fast, striking above, below, and on either side. Some came with a loud rap against the boards nailed up for a breast-work, but few came right in at the open window. Still now and then one better aimed than usual rushed in like a rocket, and the value of the preparation made was evident.

If there had been no defenders there, without doubt that portion of the palace would soon have been in a blaze, for the torches thrown had been prepared with some violently inflammable resin, and filled the place with a pungent smoke as they fell.

But their time for burning was short. Quickly as they came, there was always some one ready to dart upon them, plunge them into a jar of water, and drop them down into the court.

Still, in spite of the ill success of the movement, the brands were thrown in by the men, who darted from the shelter of the wall and back as soon as they had thrown the missile, while the bright glow which rose showed that a party must be busy there getting the torches well alight while others were being thrown.

This had been going on for quite a quarter of an hour, the enemy working away with impunity, not one being hurt; and it seemed as if they meant to keep on till the room began to blaze.

"This won't do, Phra," said Harry at last; "it's sickening, we ought to fire at the next who runs out."

"It would be impossible to hit," said Phra bitterly.

"I know," cried Harry. "Back directly."

He ran round to the far wing, to find his father, the King, and several more anxiously waiting for the attack to commence upon the gate; for it was evident that a mass of the enemy were waiting, probably for the place to be on fire, before they began their advance, feeling that the blaze would confuse and dishearten the defenders, and make the task comparatively easy.

Harry was supplied with that for which he had come, and hurried back to the room, into which two brands came hissing, entering by the window as he ran in by the door.

"No, no, Sree," he cried; "don't touch that one," and the hunter rose again while the boy stooped, those who looked on catching a glimpse of a canister as the boy held a fuse to the flame. waited till it began to fizz and spit tiny sparks, and then rushed

with it to the window, leaned out, making himself a mark for the next thrower whose torch whizzed by his ear, and then, well calculating his distance, the boy pitched the canister so that it, too, made a curve in the air, emitting scintillations as it flew, and dropped down on the far side of the wall just where the glow arose and formed a halo of light.

"There," he cried, "if you're so fond of fireworks, how do you like that?"

The words had hardly passed his lips before there was a tremendous concussion, a deafening roar, and the light which arose went out as suddenly as it had come; the glow had gone, and the throwing of the torches was at an end.

"Any one hurt?" cried Harry.

"No; are you, Hal?"

"No, I don't think so. But has that stopped them?" he continued, as he looked out. "Yes, you can hear them running. They're gone. But oh! I say! there's a big gap blown through the wall."

Sree had picked up the still burning torch and now handed it to Harry, who threw it down into the court to make sure; and there plainly enough he could see an opening about four feet wide, offering an easy entrance for the enemy if they came on again.

"Here," cried Harry, "all of you follow us; we must go round and be ready to beat them back. We must have some spears as well."

The lad's promptness in proposing the right thing at the right moment naturally made him leader, and as he rushed out of the door all followed along the passage and downstairs to the terrace, so that they might run round.

But as they ran they became conscious of a sudden roar of voices, coming, though they knew it not, from two directions, and the rattle of musketry began.

For the enemy had taken the explosion at the back of the palace and the flash of light as the signal for them to advance; and with a wild burst of cries they came rushing towards the gate and the walls at the sides, provided with ladders, while from the landing-place by the river another column landed from the boats came on with a roar.

The noise increased, and volley after volley was fired; but it soon grew desultory and weaker, for, unchecked by their losses, the enemy came on in their determined attack, driving the defenders along the paths leading to the river, and swarming over the gate and walls in a way that the weak force behind the barricade could not resist.

Shot, hoarse yell, roar of defiance, and the clattering and ringing of spears, were mingled in wild confusion; and just as Harry and his little party reached the terrace, ready to rush round by the back, it was to awaken to the fact that the little reserve gathered there when he fetched the impromptu shell had rushed forward

to assist those by the gate who were being driven back by sheer weight of numbers.

"Stand fast!" cried Phra. "Spears, spears!"

He set the example of seizing one from a sheaf placed ready by the door; the others followed, and they were able to plant themselves, a little compact body of ten, ready to try and cover their friends, who from the dark paths leading to the water and from the barrier were retreating, fighting hand to hand, their emptied pieces being only of use now as spears, thanks to the bayonets they had fixed.

It was all over in the space of a minute. The defenders faced their enemies to the last; for the final retreat up the steps to the terrace was made backwards, as they came closer together till they were shoulder to shoulder, presenting a *chevaux de frise* of bayonets to the stabbing spears of their enemies, till those first to reach the great doorway were crowded through, carrying those who had tried to cover them in first in spite of their efforts.

But Harry in the wild excitement had a clear head. He and his companions, though so few in number, still retained their muskets, and these were loaded.

Quick as the thought which occurred to him, he called upon his party to follow, and led the way to the window at the side, one that he had seen carefully provided with a breastwork ready for defenders, though he little thought he was to be one of those who would first prove its value.

He saw it now, though; and as the great door was being held by those at bay, all inside now, and the enemy were pressing forward to follow them in, he got his own party crowded at the window.

"At the word," he cried, as every musket was brought to bear on the dense crowd not five yards away.

There was a momentary pause.

"Present—fire!" he roared, and the ten muskets were discharged like one, literally tearing a little alley through the crowd.

The effect was so sudden and startling to the attacking party that they fell back with one accord; but only for a few moments.

Moments were vital then; and brief as the time was, it had given enough for some of those first driven in to get to and man the window on the other side of the door.

Recovering from their surprise, the enemy yelled and rebounded, to come on again, when the sharp word of command was given, and a volley rattled from that side.

It was another check, and the two together gave time for the defenders in the great doorway to bang it to, thrust in the bolts, and clang the bars across.

"Twenty of you follow me to the upper windows," cried Mr. Kenyon. "You sir, hold those two windows. Fire in turn from each side. Volleys, mind; they have ten times the effect."

By this time Harry's party had reloaded, and as with a savage

yell the disappointed enemy divided to make for the windows, another volley tore through them.

The King had obeyed his friend, and his first step had been to get twenty of his panting followers in a line and order them to load. Then he divided them into two firing parties, ten on either side, to support those at the windows.

The fighting already gone through had been magnificent as a discipline, and in an incredibly short time the reserves were ready; and at a word Harry's party, who had been holding the window with bayonets, dropped back to reload, while the fresh ten stepped up and delivered their fire, holding the place in turn with their bayonets till Harry's party had reloaded.

The same thing was going on at the other window, while now from the floor above, crash after crash, volley after volley, Mr. Kenyon's party joined in their fire.

"Here, Sree," whispered Harry, "my arm has gone bad; you must load for me."

There was no reply.

"Where's Sree?" cried Harry again.

No one had seen him since they fired the first volley, and Harry uttered a groan as he felt sure that the poor fellow must have gone down from a spear thrust.

But there was no time to think in the darkness where they were pent up. It was every man's duty to make his ammunition tell upon the seething, savage crowd athirst for their blood, and the volley firing was kept up steadily, the ammunition chests in the middle of the hall being amply supplied in readiness for such an emergency, and every window attacked had its defenders directly.

All at once Mr. Kenyon's voice was heard from above.

"Where is the King?" he cried.

"Here. Are you losing ground up there?"

"No, sir, no. My men can keep up their fire there. I came to speak to you," he said in a low voice, but it was close to where the two boys were standing, and they heard every word. "We must do our best," he said, "for the whole country seems up against us. They have cast off all concealment now, and are coming up to the gate in thousands, many of them with lanthorns at the end of their spears. Where are the home-made shells?"

"There, in a chest by themselves beneath the great table."

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Kenyon. "I am going to throw a few down from one of the upper windows. Oh, if we could have fired those mines!"

"The attack was too sudden," said the King. "The poor fellows had not a chance."

"I ought to have gone there sooner," groaned Mr. Kenyon.

The words had hardly passed his lips when the great hall became light as day for a moment, and then there was a roar like a peal of thunder, making the bamboo sun-blinds rattle and the whole place quiver.

"Hurrah!" shouted Harry. "I know. That's Sree!"

He did not pause to think how Sree could have been by him so short a time before and down at the barrier then.

Even if he had felt disposed to wonder, the thought would have been driven out of his head, for in the midst of the sudden silence which had succeeded the tremendous roar it was repeated—the other mine had been fired, with a report which seemed louder than the first.

The silence, both inside and out, was now appalling, and those within ceased reloading, as they waited, wondering what the effect had been upon the enemy, and whether such a catastrophe as that which must have befallen them would be followed by a retreat.

But it was the turn of the besieged now to receive a shock, for all at once the faces of those who thronged the court began to be visible in the darkness. In another minute there came flash after flash, showing thousands of gleaming eyes, and a spontaneous yell of savage delight rose up from all around as the light grew brighter.

"The palace—at the back!" cried Harry wildly. "Oh, Phra, we oughtn't to have left our posts."

"They have come in through the wall and fired the place," said Phra with a groan.

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon coolly; "but half a keg of powder will tear down our connection with the main building, and we can still hold this wing to the bitter end."

"What's that? Are they bringing big guns against us?" cried the King.

No one replied, but stood listening, as *thud, thud, thud*, at regular intervals there came the reports of heavy pieces, followed by a fresh surprise.

All at once there was a bright light from the direction of the river. Then another, which began to light up the trees in that direction, while, with a strange rapidity as the heavy firing went on, blaze after blaze sprang up, and it was now Mr. Kenyon's turn to be wildly excited.

"Hark!" he shouted. "Do you hear that?"

His answer was a wild burst of cheering from all the defenders present, as if in echo to the faint shouting which came off the river.

"Hurrah!" cried Harry again. "Shout, Phra, shout! It's the help at last. It must be men-o'-war boats, and they're firing the enemy's barges as they come."

"Yes, Sahib Harry," said a familiar voice. "English sailors with guns in boats, but the place is on fire and burning fast."

At least a dozen of the light barges on the river were burning fiercely now, and drifting amongst and setting fire to others; but the firing from that direction had ceased.

Then all at once there was a hearty cheer and a volley of musketry, while by the bright light which illumined the courtyard a movement began to be visible amongst the besiegers.

In an instant Mr. Kenyon called upon those present, and volley after volley was sent tearing through the crowd moving now towards the gate. In another minute there was a rush from the now lit-up walks leading to the landing, and a strong body of sailors dashed out into the open, formed up in line, fired a fresh volley, and then charged across at the retiring enemy.

That was enough. This charge from disciplined men, who came on with a tremendous cheer, broke the neck of the attack, and the crowd scattered and fled, seeking who could be first outside, for the way was clear, the great gates and twenty feet of the wall being completely swept away.

A volley or two from the sailors hastened the flight, but no pursuit was attempted, and the men were wheeled round and halted in front of the terrace, their officers advancing to congratulate those whom they had so opportunely relieved ; while as soon as a strong party had been stationed at the ruined gates the efforts of every one were directed to the burning palace, the far end of which was blazing furiously.

"Look here," said the lieutenant in command of the sailors, "it seems a pity ; but if it is not done, the whole place must burn down."

"What would you do ?" said the King.

"Blow up the burning rooms—the farther end," said Mr. Kenyon promptly.

"That's it," said the lieutenant. "If you've half a keg of powder, we'll soon manage that, and a few hundred buckets of water will do the rest."

It was a pity, but it was like lopping off a diseased limb, and half an hour after another explosion had suddenly shaken down that end of the lightly built palace not a spark was visible.

The next morning there was a ghastly array of sufferers lying about the precincts of the palace, but not an enemy to be seen. The great force gathered against the little knot of defenders had melted away. Weapons were hidden, and the spirit of the rebellion seemed to have quite evaporated, so that thousands of those who had been ready to fight desperately in the second king's cause eagerly returned to their daily avocations as soon as the news spread after the defeat that their leader and those who had headed the conspiracy had fled up the country to try and escape to safety in another land.

It was while the naval officer in command of the sailors was collecting all the men he could—most of them members of the inimical force, but peaceful enough now—to set to work and remove all the ghastly traces of the late fight, that Harry and Phra came suddenly upon the old hunter and his two men superintending a gang of about twenty Siamese laden with spears and kries, which

were being carried into one of the great sheds by the elephant stables.

"Why, there's Adong!" cried Harry. "Here, how did you get back?"

"He came with the sailors in one of the boats, Sahib," said Sree, answering for his man, who nudged him to reply.

"Then it was he who found an English ship to send help?"

"Oh, yes, Sahib Phra; but it took him a long time, and he began to fear that he would not find one at last."

"Where did he find it?"

"Sailing on the sea, and coming to our river, Sahib. He says he could not help being so long."

"But how about the firing of those mines, Sree?" cried Harry. "You did that?"

"Yes, Sahib."

"How did you manage it? You were with us."

"I went to a window where there were no fighting men, Sahib, and dropped out to go down to the gate, where hundreds of men were crowding in."

"But didn't they stop you?"

"No, Sahib; I was not an Englishman, and I played with them."

"Played with them?"

"Yes, Sahib; I held my arm, and I walked lame, and they said to themselves, 'Here is a brave man who has been wounded,' and they let me go. I knew that the Sahib wanted the powder to go off at a time like that, and I crept to the places where the wires were hidden among the stones. I pulled first one and then the other. It was very horrible, Sahibs, but they were enemies seeking to kill the King and his friends, so it was right that I should fire the mines."

CHAPTER XXXIII WHAT FOLLOWED

SREE'S daring act with the mines, and the coming of the sailors who had burned the enemy's fleet of warboats, combined to completely dishearten the rebels, who fled, to a man; and the next day the people were poling back their houseboats to their old places about the banks of the river, trade was going on, and scores of the King's servants and retainers came flocking in, many of whom had no doubt taken part in the attack upon the palace, but the majority had fled through fear.

The wounded were for the most part helped and fetched away, saving the bad cases, which were attended by Dr. Cameron and the surgeon from the ship; and excepting that strong guards were stationed at the levelled gates and the broken wall there was no sign of the effects of the siege twenty-four hours after the enemy had taken flight.

The presence of the British war-ship in the river, with her guns and the naval detachment, helped to awe the people ; but with the flight of the second king and his party the rebellion died, the hatred of the English colony was forgotten, and Harry felt half angry, half amused, to see the competition which ensued in the course of a few hours among the work-people of the city, who nearly fought for the right to rebuild the bungalows which had been destroyed.

To be brief, in a few days the King was more firmly seated upon the throne than ever, for the inimical party had been swept away, and his people vied among themselves to prove who were the most devoted servants he possessed.

It was about three months later, and after the departure of the man-of-war, that Harry and Phra were going round the English quarter, where the rebuilding was well in progress, Mr. Kenyon's bungalow most forward of all.

"They have worked, Phra," cried Harry triumphantly. "Why, in another fortnight we shall be able to begin housekeeping again. Mike has bought boat-loads of things ready to come in as soon as the place is dry."

"Yes," said Phra ; "they are getting on fast. These light bamboo-built places are soon raised ; but I don't see why you should be in such a hurry. Aren't you comfortable up at the palace ? "

"Comfortable ? " cried Harry. "It would be a shame if we weren't. No one could be nicer than the King."

"To his friends," said Phra gravely. "His enemies think differently."

"He has no enemies now," said Harry.

"No, not now, for the last of those who headed the rising have left the country."

"All those who could," said Harry, with a meaning look.

"Don't talk about it," said Phra, with a spasm of pain in his face. "We were talking about you coming back here to live. Aren't you afraid of another volcanic eruption ? "

"N—no," said Harry. "We should be more on our guard if one were threatening."

"There will not be another for many years," said Phra gravely. "My father has shown the people what he can do when roused, and he means to be more severe with any who stir up the people against what he does and his favouring of the English. I am sure we shall all be safe for many years to come. Don't hurry to get away from the palace ; father wants you to stay—so do I."

"Yes, that's very nice, but it isn't home, Phra, old chap, and we English people like to be independent and have our own nests. But I was thinking that if there was another rising in a few years, we should be grown men and able to do better."

"You couldn't. Could they, Cameron ? " said a voice behind them.

" You there, father ? " cried Harry, flushing.

" Where should I be but in my own home, sir ? The doctor and I have just come for a look round. But the museum looks bad, boys."

" Yes, father. Phra and I were talking last night about having a turn in the jungle with Sree to begin collecting."

" And also about a rebellion in the future, and fighting better when you are men. The doctor and I hope and believe that if there is war again it will be against a foreign enemy, and the people will be joining their wise and progressive King in defending themselves. Eh, Cameron ? "

" We shall have no more risings," said the doctor decisively, " for the people will never forget the way in which the last was put down. We are like your father, Phra, stronger than ever now."

" Let's end here," said Mr. Kenyon. " One such incident as that trouble at the palace is enough in any boy's life."

The two elders walked away to meet Mrs. Cameron, who had come down to join her husband ; and the boys stood looking at one another.

" No more fighting, Phra," said Harry ; " but we've got the museum to fill."

" Yes ; when shall we begin ? "

" At once," said Harry. " So let's go and find old Sree."